



RIVER TOWNS

Heritage Development Strategy

Lancaster-York Heritage Region • Rivertownes PA USA • 2008

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Executive Summary

The communities along the Lower Susquehanna River - Columbia, Wrightsville, Marietta, Washington Boro, Long Level, and Accomac - are undergoing changes in population, economic markets, and natural resource quality that point to a shared, renewed future. The River Towns Heritage Development Strategy is a framework for collaborative action towards leveraging these changes to create improvements. It is based in a desire to focus on the special assets (especially the unique character of the Susquehanna and its historic towns) and competitive advantages of the region - to foster an optimistic, regional way of viewing the area.



As healthy lifestyles and quality of place become key factors in business investment decisions and relocation choices, the recreational appeal of the Susquehanna River is increasingly recognized by regional leaders as a key asset. It was this recognition of the river's new opportunities that stimulated the Lancaster-York Heritage Region and Rivertownes PA USA (Rivertownes) to initiate a strategic planning project involving committed leaders from the River Towns communities.

Impetus for the Strategy

The Lancaster-York Heritage Region is bisected by the wide Susquehanna River, dotted with green islands and crossed by bridges. On both sides its valley is framed by forested bluffs that stretch for miles, giving way to rich agricultural fields and occasional settlements. Nestled next to the shore are the historic communities of Columbia, Marietta and Washington Boro in Lancaster County, and Wrightsville, Accomac, and Long Level in York County. From colonial times and ferry crossings, through the canal era and the age of coal, iron, and timber into the era of railroads and now automobiles, the fortunes of these communities have always been linked to the river. Once it functioned as an instrument for industry and timbering, with mills, factories and power plants on its banks, and each spring, millions of board feet of lumber headed downstream from timberlands to the north and west.

The role of the Susquehanna is changing quickly. Today, the river's improving health, growing importance as a recreational resource, and status as one of the region's key assets are increasingly being recognized. With its waters fast becoming cleaner, the river is emerging as a major recreational attraction; initiatives like water trails, greenways, and bike trails are underway. Major land owners, including electric utility companies, are engaged in land conservation efforts in the river valley. Another era of great potential, based in recreation and natural resources rather than industry, is beginning.

Other riverfront communities have already made this shift and have seen subsequent increases in quality of life and prosperity. In the late 1970s in Harrisburg, PA, local leaders began to view the Susquehanna River as a natural re-

source that could drive recreational use and riverfront economic development. The development of City Island and the growing popularity of the river for boating and water sports helped to shift perceptions about the city's waterfront. Today, Harrisburg's riverfront is one of the city's most important assets, and the downtown has seen resurgence in urban residents and new businesses. Likewise, the Schuylkill River in Philadelphia and the Kiski-Conemaugh in Central Pennsylvania have transformed their communities. The former catalyzed strong economic growth in the Manayunk community and brought water recreation back to the core city, and the latter was altered over time from a filthy waterway full of coal silt to a state-recognized natural and recreational resource with excellent fishing. These are but a few models that the River Towns can look to as the Susquehanna evolves in their own region.

Of all that is poised to happen here in the next five to ten years, perhaps the biggest opportunity is the Susquehanna Greenway. The state, scores of municipalities, and major conservation organizations are actively engaged in developing the greenway, a key feature of which involves conservation of the Lower Susquehanna river's bluffs, now mostly owned by utility companies. The Susquehanna Heritage Park is a related effort in York County. Highpoint Scenic Vista and Recreation Area has already opened for public use. If the other park focus areas are kept in a natural state and made available for public use, this amazing landscape centered on the river could become a regional park and recreation area of exemplary quality, much like the Great Smokies between North Carolina and Tennessee or Acadia in Maine. Such beautiful, protected parklands give a competitive advantage and great economic value to the communities on their edges.

This growing attractiveness brings with it possibilities for increased growth and development in and around the communities. An excellent transportation network enables a growing number of people to live here and work in Harrisburg, suburban Baltimore, or Philadelphia. Their needs are creating new markets and contributing to rapid change on our familiar landscape. The economy of the region is good, with the growing population ensuring strong residential demand and a need for retail and other commercial offerings.

In the face of possible change brought by development, the retention of historic character is an important element of the Strategy. Each of the River

Towns is special, especially to its residents, and nearby rural communities are also recognized for contributing unique characteristics to the region.

Columbia. The historic character of Columbia comes from the red brick and stone 19th century commercial buildings and residential neighborhoods that constitute a large historic district increasingly known for its antique shops, historic market house and "main street" charm. Its economy came from the river first and then the railroad and the iron furnaces that dotted the river shore. Relocating Rt. 441 will take heavy truck traffic out of the town center, an improvement likely to stimulate more revitalization along Locust Street. Another major community project in Columbia is the expansion of River Park.

Wrightsville. Wrightsville's long history dates to John Wright's ferry in 1728, which was followed by a succession of bridges, including the 1930 Veterans Memorial Bridge that crosses to Columbia on the opposite bank. The town's location on the Susquehanna & Tidewater Canal led to the growth of foundries, one of which still operates today on North Front Street. Wrightsville was the farthest point east reached by the Confederate forces on June 28, 1863 during the Civil War. Much of Wrightsville has been designated a historic district on the National Register of Historic Places.

Marietta. Marietta's unusual street pattern results from the merger of two earlier towns in 1812. Like Columbia, its economy came from the river first and then the railroad and iron furnaces. The only publicly accessible, intact remains of the iron industry is the Musselman/Vesta Iron Furnace office building that is presently being restored. Nearly half of the town is included in a historic district listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Marietta's strong 19th century character and the work of the energetic Marietta Restoration Associates contribute to its reputation as one of the best-preserved historic towns in Pennsylvania.

Washington Boro. The scale of Washington Boro's street grid seems to contrast with the historic community's small size until one learns how hydroelectric dams raised the river's level in the early 20th century, flooding a portion of the town. Engaged residents have recently renovated a stone mill building as the Blue Rock Heritage Center. Under nearby fields are the archeological remains of what was once a Native American village of more than 3,000 people. The alluvial soil produces some of the finest tomato crops in the state. The

town hosts an annual Tomato Festival that attracts participants from a broad region.

Long Level. Named for the long stretch of canal without locks in this reach, this area has been a popular summer recreation area for boating and fishing for generations. The Susquehanna Heritage Park, now under development, will enhance and showcase these assets.

Accomac. Once the site of a ferry, now a quiet riverside community in the midst of superb natural features that include a notable gorge and waterfall.

The River Towns and their surrounding rural communities are within a compact five-mile radius, yet each is distinctly different with its own strong identity.

Strategy Context & Methodology

In 2001, the Lancaster-York Heritage Region came into being, designated by the Commonwealth as part of the Pennsylvania Heritage Areas Program. The Commonwealth cited the long and distinguished role of this area in the development of the United States as the underlying rationale for designation. The significance of the Heritage Region is linked to its towns and countryside, long association with religious and national freedom, agricultural heritage, innovative manufacturing, and the strong presence of nature, specifically the Susquehanna River.

The goals of the Heritage Region's management plan are being implemented by the Lancaster-York Heritage Region, the nonprofit organization created by business, civic and government leaders from the two counties. It works in partnership and collaboration with local governments, businesses, and civic organizations throughout Lancaster and York Counties. The Heritage Region's goals are:

- Build Understanding and Identity through Interpretation
- Enhance the Visitor Experience
- Strengthen Place: Preserve Town Centers, Conserve Natural Resources, Celebrate Traditions
- Build Strong Institutions for Partnership

The river is at the very center of the Heritage Region. The towns that grew on its banks are among the area's most distinctive places in terms of their physical character, history, community and settings. They are gems and, when polished, they will add immeasurably to the high quality of life for which the region is known.

As one of its priority initiatives, the Heritage Region has sponsored this Heritage Development Strategy for these river towns and their environs. Columbia, Marietta, Wrightsville, and the outlying communities of Long Level, Washington Boro, and Accomac, have been active participants in the planning process, which was funded by the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, County of Lancaster, Borough of Columbia, Borough of Marietta, Borough of Wrightsville, York County Community Foundation, private sources and Rivertownes PA USA, a non-profit organization active in promoting quality of life and regional collaboration. The Strategy was developed collaboratively and provides recommendations for improving the physical and economic condition of the River Towns in ways that capitalize on their strong historical character and setting.

The Strategy was developed with the support of the Heritage Region and Rivertownes and with input from a broad range of groups and individuals. An advisory committee comprised of local leadership from the communities provided guidance, input, and oversight through several meetings. A well-attended public workshop in January 2006 informed the planning process and helped define new directions for the River Towns. An interpretive workshop involved local historians to discuss the historical significance of the communities, and a leadership workshop allowed local "doers"—those who are in positions to implement the Strategy's recommendations—to preview its concepts and provide feedback. The Heritage Region and Rivertownes sponsored a May 2006 public presentation of the plan's recommendations and facilitated discussion about how each community might approach implementation. Finally, in September 2006, each of the borough councils was given a presentation on the Strategy's direction and recommendations.

This inclusive public approach fine-tuned emerging strategies and strengthened the recommendations, resulting in a Strategy that addresses current and future challenges and opportunities for the communities within the context of their traditional character and regional economic conditions. It identifies major assets and heritage resources within these communities and articulates

priorities. The sponsoring organizations – The Heritage Region and Rivertownes – will continue to advocate regional collaboration and support the work of local governments and community organizations in implementing the ideas contained in the plan, outlined below and discussed in more detail throughout the Strategy document.

Strategy Elements

The Strategy outlines how the communities surrounding the Lower Susquehanna can benefit from the opportunities facing them today. In each town, there are projects underway or in the planning stages that, if linked to the region's broader prospects for change, could create significant community improvement and a fresh way of seeing the River Towns. The Strategy offers a framework to take the first steps toward this new future.

Vision

What might the future hold for the River Towns? This could be a journalist's description of the region ten or twenty years from now:

Thanks to the region's forward-thinking leaders, the forested bluffs, river lands, and green islands of the Susquehanna River valley have become a vital recreation amenity enjoyed by residents as well as hundreds of thousands of visitors attracted by its natural setting, spectacular views, hiking trails and access to boating.

The cluster of communities that make up the River Towns are thriving as gateways to this conserved and beloved natural area. In the historic town centers of Columbia, Wrightsville, and Marietta are shops, restaurants, inns and services that attract a regional market. More people are living in the downtowns, too, enjoying amenities and growing vitality. Attractive parks and landscaped walks connect each of the town centers to the river. Nearby, Washington Boro, Long Level, and Accomac are nestled into protected lands that make them increasingly desirable as places to visit and explore.

The long and eventful history of each of the River Towns has been brought to life by wayside panels, exhibits, and programs at popular heritage centers and historic sites. Programming at the acclaimed Susquehanna Heritage Park attracts residents and

visitors from afar. An unexpected benefit of the interpretive programs has been that newcomers more easily understand and are able to become involved in this special place and the communities they have chosen as home.

The region continues to grow, yet these towns and the valley landscape have retained their traditional patterns, historic character and appeal. Linking it all together is the ever-present Susquehanna River, which has never been cleaner or more loved, for it both connects and defines the River Towns.

The building blocks for such a future are here today. The River Towns are in an unprecedented position to leverage major existing and planned initiatives towards a vibrant economy and greater community pride. With leadership, the River Towns can collaborate to achieve this vision that has resonated with residents and leaders during the planning process. The response of community members has been strongly in support of goals that bridge differences and focus on shared values and mutual benefit.



Two well-attended public meetings informed the planning process.

Goals

The Strategy offers ideas and potential projects in support of the goals. Some build from projects already being undertaken or planned by one or more of the towns. Some are small and achievable in the short term or in phases. Others are ambitious and will take more time and strong engagement and leadership. Others still require collaboration among local governments, businesses, and civic leaders to agree and speak as one region. Increasingly, scarce public funds will go to those places that prove the ability to act in concert and cross traditional boundaries; the Strategy provides a set of recommendations for developing that ability.

Goal 1: Position the River Towns as thriving gateways to the natural beauty and recreation amenities of the Susquehanna.

- Actively support implementation of the Susquehanna Greenway, the Susquehanna Heritage Park, and related efforts to assure conservation of river bluffs and heritage resources.
- Work with the Susquehanna Valley Chamber of Commerce, the PA Dutch and York County Convention and Visitors Bureaus, and other tourism promotion groups to develop communication materials that convey the full recreational experiences available along the river.
- Improve the landings of Veterans Memorial Bridge in Wrightsville and Columbia.
- Organize regular community clean-up days to remove litter and trim weeds on publicly owned land.

Goal 2: Strengthen connections between the towns and the river, both physically and in terms of community identity.

- Connect Columbia's Rotary Park with River Park.
- Improve Wrightsville's South Front Street Park.
- Build pedestrian piers and river overlooks on the historic bridge sup-

ports.

- Improve street connections between Marietta's downtown and the river.

Goal 3: Bring the centers of these historic towns back to life.

- Establish a regional Main/Elm Street Program as a state demonstration pilot: Columbia, Wrightsville, and Marietta.
- Stimulate adaptive reuse of downtown buildings for overnight accommodations and residential units.
- Improve Gay Street in Marietta.

Goal 4: Retain distinctions between the River Towns and their surrounding agricultural and natural landscape.

- Host forums that engage leaders and elected officials of the Counties and adjacent jurisdictions around the shared benefits of smart growth and agricultural preservation, leading towards inter-municipal planning.
- Use available planning tools, such as zoning and historic overlay, to preserve historic character.

Goal 5: Heighten understanding of the history and heritage of the River Towns.

- Support efforts to create the Susquehanna Heritage Park near Long Level and develop programs at the Blue Rock Heritage Center in Washington Boro.
- Undertake joint heritage activities among Columbia, Wrightsville, and Marietta.
- Design and fabricate interpretive installations at Washington Boro, Vesta Iron Furnace, and other key locations, complementing those of the Lancaster-York Heritage Region and Rivertownes PA USA.

Implementation

Plans are only words without action. The Strategy includes specific implementation information, including lead and partner organizations, cost ranges or key investments, potential sources of funding, and a timeline in the chapter entitled “Priorities and Resources.” The recommendations in the Strategy are rooted in the expressed vision and desires of River Towns residents and leaders and will require their energy and support for implementation to succeed.

The coordinating function for accomplishing the River Towns Heritage Development Strategy rests with **Rivertownes PA USA** as the lead and the **Lancaster-York Heritage Region** as the primary supporting organization. These organizations will work closely with others in fundraising, publicity, organizing groups for action, and various aspects of implementation. The precedent for this structure has been set by the planning process for the Strategy itself—each of the towns and counties contributed funds to the planning project in addition to grants secured by Rivertownes and the Heritage Region, and the latter two organizations oversaw and coordinated the process. Rivertownes will continue to coordinate regional and local actions, long-range initiatives, and pilot projects, but in most cases, local action will be the power and guide with support and linkage between projects coming from both Rivertownes and the Heritage Region.

- The **Lancaster-York Heritage Region** is a great resource to the River Towns. As one of the state’s 12 official heritage areas, the Heritage Region helps identify, preserve, interpret and promote the heritage and culture of York and Lancaster Counties. The Heritage Region has the support of business, civic, and government leaders throughout Lancaster and York Counties, and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, which together comprise the designated heritage area. The Heritage Region staff can provide professional and technical support for River Towns initiatives. More information is available online at www.StoriesoftheLand.com.
- **Rivertownes PA USA** is the active local nonprofit organization that has been encouraging collaboration while itself undertaking regional enhancement projects such as the handsome and informative panels near a number of River Towns historic sites. More information is available online at www.rivertownes.org

The local borough and county governments are a pivotal source of support and partnership. The work program laid out in the Strategy cannot be accomplished without the blessing, cooperation, support, and, ideally, leadership of the region’s local governments. The boroughs and counties have been supportive throughout the planning process and have indicated strong interest in the recommendations herein.

An important partner for implementation is the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The state’s **Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR)** has an increasing focus on growth of and planning around greenways and waterways, acknowledging the role of these natural resources in economic development and activity generation. Increasingly, DCNR’s Heritage Areas Program and other initiatives are focusing on green infrastructure and its intersection with other concerns like economic development, and the state’s greenways plan strengthens this shift. The Susquehanna Greenway is a corridor of land and water that includes the Susquehanna River and its West Branch; both York and Lancaster Counties are part of it. The Heritage Region is the Regional Lead Organization for the Lower Susquehanna Region of the greenway. Opportunities for funding and programmatic support for initiatives that link to and aid the river and the Susquehanna Greenway, organized and run by the Susquehanna Greenway Partnership, will promote local action on the recommendations of the Strategy.

Pennsylvania’s Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) works with businesses and communities to secure their success in the Commonwealth. The department’s Community Development and Local Government Services divisions are likely sources of funding and technical assistance for recommendations on the revitalization of the historic River Towns themselves.

Pennsylvania’s Department of Transportation (PennDOT) oversees all work on state roads and rights of way. Because some of the Strategy’s recommendations center on improving physical connections among the communities, PennDOT’s expertise and ability to accommodate the needs of the River Towns will be important to their success.

The Susquehanna Valley Chamber of Commerce is an existing regional economic development organization that already promotes the three River Towns at their visitor center in Columbia. Further marketing initiatives or special events would include the chamber.

Other potential partner organizations include the convention and visitors bureaus and housing and redevelopment agencies in both counties, real estate developers, heritage and history organizations, and many more.

In addition to the need to identify and help motivate support partners, successful implementation will also require changes in some existing perceptions.

A history of rivalry and little collaboration amongst the towns has begun to change with the involvement of the Heritage Region and Rivertownes. Success in implementing the Strategy will require ongoing coordination beyond town borders.

The Susquehanna has long been regarded as a hard-working river and an industry-based economic engine for the region. Only in recent years—with efforts to clean its water and make its shoreline more available to the public—has it been viewed as a major recreational resource: an economic engine of another sort. As opportunities for recreation on and along the river increase, so too will its value as a visitor attraction. As efforts to clean and conserve its watershed continue, its value as a nationally significant natural asset will increase. At the same time, locals who have long-held views of the Susquehanna as dirty, inaccessible, and even dangerous will develop a fresh perspective on this waterway, the heartbeat of South Central Pennsylvania.

The availability of funds is often viewed as a major hurdle to success. However, funding is seldom the obstacle when people believe change is possible and leaders want to make good things happen. The ideas in the Strategy are largely eligible for state funding support, often through a collection of several state programs. Some even lend themselves to federal programs. In addition, foundations are known to support such activities as heritage education and community leadership development. The success of the Strategy's implementation rests largely on the birth and growth of a new perspective in the River Towns and an opportunity for a new approach to community building in the region. Old beliefs about communities once viewed as fading in vitality will



The River Towns Heritage Development Strategy is about erasing boundaries, pooling resources and working together.

gradually give way to a sense that the River Towns are thriving again with new purpose: to provide high quality of life to residents and to provide an attractive gateway to the recreational and natural resources of the Susquehanna. As the image of the river as an asset for a different type of economic development grows, so too shall the success and strength of the River Towns. Like the Schuylkill River in Philadelphia and the Kiski-Conemaugh in central Pennsylvania, the Susquehanna will be the heartbeat at the center of this vital and growing region.

Section One:

The River Towns Today

The River Towns and their environs are located along the Susquehanna River in Lancaster and York Counties. The three core communities are Columbia, Marietta, and Wrightsville. Columbia and Wrightsville began as communities around a ferry crossing and grew—as did Marietta—as the Susquehanna and Tidewater Canal, the later Pennsylvania Canal, and the Pennsylvania Railroad arrived in the 19th century. The hard-working life of raftmen who moved goods down the river and later canal and rail workers lent an aura of roughness to the culture of the towns historically. The area has remained a transportation nexus for hundreds of years, and today this region is well connected to major markets and population centers by rail and highways, including State Route 462 and U.S. 30, which connect with I-83. Thus, the River Towns are within a two-hour drive of several major metropolitan areas: Philadelphia, Harrisburg, Baltimore and Washington, DC.



Markets do not coincide with municipal boundaries. Regional statistics provide a more useful index of the region's population and economic trends. The population in York and Lancaster Counties more than doubled in the second half of the twentieth century, growing from 437,000 in 1950 to more than 900,000 today. The growth rate between 1990 and 2000 was about 12 percent and remains strong, with an average of 6,400 housing units added to the two-county region each year. At the same time, older core areas—the cities and boroughs—are losing population while the outlying townships gain. This trend is particularly evident in Lancaster County. Many farms have been converted to residential subdivisions in East Donegal, Manor, and West Hempfield townships, which gained a total of 5,500 new residents between 1990 and 2000; this represents more than 90 percent of the project focus area's net population increase. This growth, coupled with the region's historic character, scenic drives, and recreation opportunities, represents a potential new market for downtown businesses in the form of new residents.

The area's economy is growing. The region has seen 15% job growth from 1990-2005, with total of 64,000 jobs added. The three local River Towns zip codes encompass about 8,000 jobs. Services and retail are the largest employment sectors. About 23% of jobs in the region are in manufacturing, but small, white-collar job sectors are the fastest growing. Unemployment is below 5%. The average wage in the three local zip codes—\$32,305—is below the state average of \$38,550. The average home value (2004) of \$135,000 is also much lower than the larger surrounding region.

Tourism can enhance the economic viability of businesses that also serve residents, such as dining and retail. Although the River Towns are not currently primary visitor destinations, the larger Lancaster-York region is part of a major tourism destination. In 2003, the two counties experienced more than \$2 billion in tourist spending, representing about nine percent of all visitor spending activity in Pennsylvania. Proximity to Harrisburg, Baltimore, and

the Washington (DC) metropolitan areas translates into an easy drive-in market for tourism offerings. At the same time, interviews with local business leaders and real estate professionals confirm that tourism alone is not a sufficient economic driver without changes in resident demographics.

Due to location, charm, and affordable housing prices, the River Towns are well-situated for city dwellers seeking affordable pre-retirement living in historic settings near water and convenient to medical facilities. Real estate professionals indicated during interviews that although most new tenants and buyers are currently local, there is increasing interest from the outside. In particular, commuters who work in York, Lancaster, and Harrisburg are more interested in the region than ever, and the region's proximity to larger markets, such as Baltimore and Philadelphia, is influencing pre-retirees, who are buying large historic homes to renovate over several years with the intent of retiring in the region. These trends, coupled with an increasing interest in Main Street environments, are spurring local investors to buy property and renovate it for resale or for higher end rentals.

At the same time, the River Towns face several market challenges compounded by their location a bit off the beaten path. Deferred maintenance of the towns' historic structures during lean decades has dampened demand. Housing demand is strengthening, but is not robust enough yet to enable buyers to build quick equity or rehabilitate and sell properties for profit. Presently, the costs of rehabilitation of downtown commercial buildings can exceed market value. Currently, the River Towns' central business districts do not provide many of the goods and services area residents seek, so shoppers



The River Towns are located centrally between Lancaster and York on Routes 30 and 462. They are within a two-hour drive from several metropolitan markets, including Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Washington, DC.

must drive to larger markets to satisfy their needs. Once there, residents are inclined to shop for all their needs. This dynamic translates into significant retail leakage from the River Towns to nearby York, Lancaster, Harrisburg, and even Baltimore. The same land use economics that send retail dollars from the River Towns to these urban areas also inform the location of entertainment uses. For jobs-producing uses, cost savings realized by locating in one of the River Towns are somewhat offset by the need to attract workers and address complex transportation linkages.

Wrightsville Today

Located directly across the river from Columbia on the old Lincoln Highway, Wrightsville sits on a slight jog in State Route 462 at the west end of Veterans Memorial Bridge. It is the smallest of the three boroughs with about 2,200 residents. The median household income is \$37,379. It is the least ethnically diverse (98 percent white) and has seen the least amount of change—more than 70 percent of Wrightsville residents lived in the same house in 2000 as in 1995, compared with less than 60 percent in the other two boroughs. Likewise, its owner occupancy rate of 72 percent is the highest of the three.

Wrightsville's long history of human habitation began with Native American settlements along the bountiful river. The first European settlers came in 1728 and started a ferry service—Wright's Ferry—to connect the western shore with Columbia and the road to Philadelphia. Until 1834, the borough was two towns—Wrightsville and Westphalia. Wilton Armetale was founded as Susquehanna Castings in Wrightsville in 1893 and thrived due to the town's location on the canal and later, the railroad. Foundries and lumber yards were the primary employers, and aside from a significant Civil War skirmish just before the Battle of Gettysburg, Wrightsville has long been a quiet river community much like it is today.

The town's history is visible in the number and quality of Wrightsville's historic resources. Much of the town is included in a historic district listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Buildings include a number of Federal, Colonial Revival, and some eclectic styles. The assemblage of historic commercial buildings along Hellam Street and in the neighborhoods gives the borough a consistent and pleasant scale throughout. Restoration of historic structures has taken place along North Front Street and in the neighborhood adjacent to it. A set of former lime kilns are situated on North Front Street as an impressive reminder of the town's industrial past. The picturesque historic stone piers of an earlier bridge, burned during the Civil War, march across the river next to Veterans Memorial Bridge. Regional residents celebrate Wrightsville's history annually when the local group, Historic Wrightsville, sponsors Heritage Days. The same all-volunteer group owns and operates a house museum and a Civil War diorama.

The western riverfront in York County is more accessible than its eastern



On North Front Street in Wrightsville, a number of 19th century houses are well-maintained by the Donsco Company, which uses them for offices.

counterpart in Lancaster County, where railroad tracks parallel the river through the River Towns region. Wrightsville has the most public access to the riverfront of all three boroughs, including a park along the river south of Veterans Memorial Bridge and two boat launches accessible from Front Street. Views and pedestrian and automobile links to the river are easy to find from Front Street. South Front Street is also State Route 624, which parallels the river and provides access to the marinas and amenities in the area of Long Level. Route 624 will be the link from Wrightsville to the Susquehanna Heritage Park, which will include new visitor education facilities focused on the history and culture of the river and its people.

At the same time, the borough's street patterns, particularly at the bridge landing, can cause confusion and difficulty navigating around town and to the river. The Hellam Street entry/exit point for Veterans Memorial Bridge is expansively paved without differential markings, landscaping, or signage for drivers. It is easy for eastbound drivers to find themselves crossing the bridge before they realize they are in Wrightsville, which translates into lost opportunities for the town's businesses. Likewise, because the Susquehanna is only accessible from Front Street and Front Street is difficult to reach from the main thoroughfare (Hellam Street) many drivers passing through Wrightsville may

not notice that one can get to the river's edge here.

On North Front Street is one of the River Towns' most well-known gathering spaces, the John Wright Store and Restaurant, adjacent to an operating foundry on the riverfront. There are also a few strong commercial offerings along Hellam Street—for example, a grocery store and meat market and a specialty bike shop. The buildings along Hellam Street include a number of storefronts that are currently in residential or marginal retail uses. The historic setting suggests greater potential for uses that, were the buildings better maintained and the sidewalks and street more inviting, could provide a range of visitor- and resident-serving uses along Wrightsville's main street.

Columbia Today

Columbia is the largest of the River Towns, with more than 10,300 residents. Its population is more diverse (9% minorities) and has the lowest median household income at \$32,385 (38% of households earn below \$25,000 per year) and the greatest concentration of people aged 65 or older (17 percent) due to the two high-rise housing units for seniors. Seventy-nine percent of Columbia's existing housing units were built prior to 1960. Housing is mostly comprised of multi-family units—just 23 percent are single family detached units. Almost 40 percent of Columbia's households are renters. Columbia residents tend to work close to home—23 percent work in the borough, and another 64 percent work in Lancaster County locations.

Columbia's compact central business district generally runs from the river to Sixth Street, along Locust Street, and along Third Street (State Route 441). The "100% corner" would appear to be Locust and North Third Street, where City Hall and the landmark Hinkle's Drugstore anchor the intersection. Along the west side of South Second Street, the rear elevations of large single family houses enjoy fine views of the river. Along the river north of Memorial Bridge (Chestnut Street) are a number of industrial and manufacturing businesses housed in industrial and warehouse buildings of varying age, style, and condition. At the river's edge south of the community's riverfront park and in the floodplain are a number of small seasonal cottages on land owned by a nearby utility company.

Columbia's town center contains strong historic fabric that is very much intact



The recently re-opened Columbia Farmers Market generates foot traffic downtown and provides new life to an historic building.

and admired by residents and visitors alike. The town contains a range of styles that include Georgian, Italianate, Federal, Colonial Revival, and Queen Anne, among others. The handsome market house, rehabilitated and re-opened as a Thursday market, is a jewel among the downtown's many historic buildings. The borough's large historic district is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and includes pleasantly scaled blocks of two- and three-story row houses in neighborhoods surrounding the commercial core. In much of the downtown core, a local historic district ordinance protects designated historic buildings. Towns with distinct character are increasingly desirable as places to live, work, shop, and visit. Columbia's historic integrity provides the town an essential competitive advantage for attracting these growing markets. Recent proposals to rescind the local preservation ordinance suggest a need to improve its administration rather than set back local stewardship efforts.

The town's heritage is shared through a collection of interpretive offerings. Well-designed interpretive panels — Heritage Region Water Trail, Rivertownes, and Pennsylvania Civil War Panels — inform residents and visitors about the bridge, the waterfront, the town's industries, and more. *Ghosts of Columbia: A Haunted Lantern Tour* is a living history experience in Mt. Bethel Cemetery, and a Juneteenth celebration ties history to today's population. The annual Antique, Arts & Crafts Show in June that closes Locust Street from Fifth to Second and the "Bridge Bust," in early October that closes Veterans Memorial Bridge to vehicular traffic each draw over 20,000 visitors to the community to

enjoy crafts, antiques and culinary experiences. The National Watch and Clock Museum, located on Poplar Street, includes a collection of over 12,000 pieces that illuminate the history of timekeeping technology, with a strong focus on nineteenth-century American clocks and watches.

Downtown Columbia has the largest concentration of commercial offerings among the River Towns. In keeping with the town's historic character, it has developed a budding reputation as a destination for antique shopping with several long-standing antique dealers supplemented by the addition of a large antiques store in a rehabilitated historic building in the center of town. Hinkle's is the community's local "third place," where local residents regularly gather, and occupies a prominent corner at Locust and Third Streets. In addition, a number of dining and other business establishments are scattered in and around downtown Columbia, some of which (like Prudhomme's Lost Cajun Kitchen) are receiving positive coverage in local and nearby media outlets.

The pleasantly scaled historic town center with attractive commercial offerings is marred by a large volume of heavy truck traffic, for Locust and Third Streets are also Route 441 and the primary access to a major regional food distribution facility and the county landfill south of town. The resulting noise, air pollution, vibration, and impacts on pedestrian safety undoubtedly inhibit the pace of downtown revitalization. Fortunately, borough leaders have recognized this and are seeking relocation of Route 441 to an area adjacent to the railroad tracks west of downtown where it could become a more boulevard-like route that avoids downtown and connects directly to South Front Street. If a similar experience in Danville (another Susquehanna River community) offers insights, such a relocation could make downtown's historic core much more attractive for retail with residences and offices in the upper stories.

Columbia has been actively planning other improvements. For instance, a Main Street Advisory Committee is pursuing Main Street designation through the Commonwealth. In addition, a plan for extensive improvements to the River Park is complete, and the borough and park advocates are actively seeking funds for phased implementation. When finished, the park will include the following components, among others:

- Railroad crossing upgrades to ADA standards
- Tree thinning to allow easier access to shoreline fishing
- Additional parking and lighting
- Marina facility
- Improved boat ramp and loading area for canoes and kayaks
- A bike and walking trail with interpretive aspects

Rerouting truck traffic, adding street trees and furniture, and increasing park and riverfront access will give Columbia a much more pedestrian-friendly downtown environment and stimulate the market for commercial office, retail and residential living.

Marietta Today

Marietta, just upriver from Columbia is largely a bedroom community of almost 2,700 residents. Nearly half of its population is between the ages of 25 and 54 and it has a small share of those aged 65 or older. About 95% of residents are white. Though the most affluent of the three towns, Marietta's median household income of \$46,905 lags the two-county region by about \$5,000.

French traders had arrived in the area as early as the seventeenth century, followed by subsequent settlers from Ireland and Scotland. In 1812, Marietta was formed through the merger of two existing towns: New Haven and Waterford. Their two main streets meet at an s-turn at Waterford Street in the center of the borough, which sits on a bend in the Susquehanna River. The town is located across the river from the ridge that runs parallel to the river, defining the valley. The commercial corridor is generally along Market Street with a small square at the intersection of Gay Street, typical of historic Pennsylvania town plans. Many of Marietta's commercial storefronts are now occupied as residences or offices. As in Columbia, riverfront access in Marietta is limited by railroad tracks. The river brought prosperity to the town in the form of iron production, for the completion of the Pennsylvania Canal and later the rail-

road enabled transporting materials in and out of the region. In recent years, Marietta has prospered through pharmaceutical research/manufacturing.



Marietta's extensive 18th and 19th century building stock has been carefully cared for by the local community, which is supportive of historic preservation and proud of its heritage.

Its river location has resulted in flooding throughout the town's history, including devastating floods in 1889 and 1972. To reduce risk of flooding, a levee project is planned for the river side of the railroad embankment. The levee will have a 20 foot-wide base, to be constructed at least in part of rip rap. There will be more than 25 gated storm/sewer access points. Advocates for a Northwest Lancaster County River Trail, planned collaboratively by several jurisdictions along the

river, hope to see a bicycle trail created as part of the levee construction.

Seventy-five percent of Marietta's housing was built prior to 1960. Many are excellent examples of Federal architecture, and an extensive National Register historic district covers 426 properties -- nearly 45% of the borough. These buildings, most often houses, form much of the character of Marietta and define it as one of the best-preserved historic towns in the region. Marietta Restoration Associates, the town's very active preservation group, prepared the town's National Register nominations (including nearby Chickies Historic District) and has restored and maintains several important structures in Marietta: the First National Bank, the Old Town Hall, the Union Meeting House and the Marietta Theater. The organization also operates the Old Town Hall Museum and sponsors educational programming and special events such as the annual Candlelight Tour, now offered for more than 40 years.

Several buildings related to the large Vesta Iron Furnace facility, including worker housing, the original office building, and ruins of the industrial structures, are on South Hazel Avenue. These are the most visible remains of Mari-

etta's days as an iron smelting giant. Access to the river's edge and a boat launch ramp is available at the Vesta site, slightly hidden through an underpass beneath the railroad viaduct. Downriver at Chickies Rock is a County park with the ruins of several more iron smelting facilities built during the Susquehanna's heyday as an industrial river, which can be explored via trails.

New housing development around Marietta has tended to happen in adjacent East Donegal Township, yet there has been limited economic synergy to date between the new populations on the edges of town and the river and town center. Despite the proximity of a strong residential market and a backdrop of well-preserved historic buildings, there are few commercial offerings in downtown Marietta to serve the needs and capture the dollars of residents or visitors. In addition, physical connections between the town and its outskirts are difficult to navigate, with some roads in the town center not linking to the town's edge development while others are difficult to find. This separation is continued between the town center and the river, for the railroad embankment creates a physical and visible barrier between the town and river that could increase with construction of the planned levee.

Outlying Communities

The remaining River Towns -- Washington Boro, Long Level, and Accomac -- all have colorful histories. Today, these attractive residential communities offer a high quality of life along the heavily wooded Susquehanna River corridor.

Washington Boro is located less than five miles south of Columbia on River Road in Manor Township. The town has long been famous for its annual tomato crops and holds a tomato festival and Heritage Days each year. The community evidences historic character and a hybrid of urban and rural form that is unique among the River Towns. Bird life is abundant in the flats and river islands near Washington Boro. The town is near the Conojahela Flats and the archaeological remains of a former Susquehannock Native American village of more than 3,000 people. A nearby mill building was recently renovated as the Blue Rock Heritage Center and is undergoing development as an interpretive and events venue. This project will eventually include an interpretive center focusing on the Susquehannock settlement and its influence in this region.



Washington Boro has had a longstanding relationship to the river, evidenced by the character and layout of its existing buildings.

Long Level, so named for the long stretch of slackwater canal without locks in this reach, has been a popular summer recreation area for boating and fishing for generations. It is located on the western shore of the river about five miles south of Wrightsville on Long Level Road in Lower Windsor Township. A number of historic buildings line the road in this rural village settlement, including an 1890s general store building that houses a popular outdoor outfitter, Shank's Mare. The area has unobstructed river access and a put-in for kayaks and canoes.

Accomac is at the former site of Anderson's Ferry and today is a secluded community north of Wrightsville and Route 30 in Hellam Township. It is surrounded by exceptional natural resources that have received honors from the Nature Conservancy and the state, among others. Wildcat Run Gorge and Wildcat Falls, for example, are designated as Pennsylvania Outstanding Geologic Features. The area is also known for excellent bass fishing. The Accomac Inn is well-known regionally for its menu, wine list, and river views.



Long Level is a popular destination for paddling, sailing, water skiing, fishing, hunting, hiking, and picnicking.



Accomac is located about two miles north of Wrightsville along the Susquehanna River.

Section Two:

Harnessing Growth and Prosperity Wisely

The River Towns are in the path of opportunity, for the region is destined to grow. Transportation networks put the towns within a two-hour drive of several major metropolitan areas and a growing number of baby boomers, who are beginning to seek more relaxed lifestyles in smaller communities, often desiring strong recreational amenities and distinctive character. Technology allows many professionals to work from home or to move their businesses to less costly areas, enabling earlier transition into retirement or second careers. Southern Pennsylvania is seeing significant increases in such residents as housing costs in Maryland and nearby metropolitan centers continue to rise.



Along both sides of the river downstream of the River Towns are nearly unbroken spans of forests and fields, much of it owned by utility companies. Negotiations between conservation organizations and land owners hold the promise that much of this land will not be subdivided but will remain in its natural state, protected and used for recreation by future generations. Such a conservation effort could enable an even brighter future for the region and help position the River Towns as gateways – much like gateways to national parks. On the western bank, York County, the Lancaster-York Heritage Region, the Farm and Natural Lands Trust, and other partners are creating the Susquehanna Heritage Park on the bluffs above the river south of Wrightsville. A world class heritage education and interpretive center is being planned as the centerpiece of the Heritage Park experience, including exhibits highlighting the largest concentration of petroglyphs or rock art in the northeastern United States. Visitors and patrons of this facility represent a new market for Wrightsville, which will be its gateway.

The River Towns are poised to capitalize on their assets and surrounding population trends. However, in opportunity there is also danger – of un-

guided, generic development that erodes the strong traditional distinction between “town” and surrounding farmland and forests. Development goes where the risk and the costs of land assembly and building are lower. It can be channeled into older town centers, but usually takes conscious public and civic effort to revitalize historic town centers.

Community leaders in the River Towns need to take measures to assure that future investment comes to the historic town centers and that new development reinforces the sense of place and character that defines the region. Wrightsville, Columbia, and Marietta are well suited for coordinated preservation-oriented downtown revitalization programs, either as stand alone programs or, ideally, as a coordinated regional “Main Street” program involving all three. Columbia is on the verge of participating in the state’s Main Street Program, which would provide technical assistance and staff support for an integrated revitalization program that could help spark building renovation, special events and more effective marketing. The state’s new Elm Street Program is intended to help older historic residential neighborhoods adjacent to revitalizing commercial areas, and again, all three communities could take

advantage of this. All three towns benefit from having historic districts listed in the National Register of Historic Places - appropriate rehabilitation of historic buildings is eligible for a 20% investment tax credit. The collaborations spurred by the actions of Rivertownes PA USA and the Lancaster-York Heritage Region through this heritage development strategic planning process offer promise for wider application.

Vision, Goals, and Recommendations

Vision

Early discussions and meetings with residents and leaders in the River Towns communities revealed several shared desires for the region. These included a focus on the river as a connecting and primary element and the importance of the region's heritage, recreation, community pride, and managing growth. A vision statement was crafted and refined based on input and feedback throughout the planning process and describes the state of the River Towns ten years from now:

Thanks to the region's forward-thinking leaders, the forested bluffs, river lands, and green islands of the Susquehanna River valley have become a vital recreation amenity enjoyed by residents as well as hundreds of thousands of visitors attracted by its natural setting, spectacular views, hiking trails and access to boating.

The cluster of communities that make up the River Towns are thriving as gateways to this conserved and beloved natural area. In the historic town centers of Columbia, Wrightsville, and Marietta are shops, restaurants, inns and services that attract a regional market. More people are living in the downtowns, too, enjoying amenities and growing vitality. Attractive parks and landscaped walks connect each of the town centers to the river. Nearby, Washington Boro, Long Level, and Accomac are nestled into protected lands that make them increasingly desirable as places to visit and explore.

The long and eventful history of each of the River Towns has been brought to life by wayside panels, exhibits, and programs at popular heritage centers and historic sites. Programming at the acclaimed Susquehanna Heritage Park attracts residents and visitors from afar. An unexpected benefit of the interpretive programs has been that

newcomers more easily understand this special place and the communities they have chosen as home.

The region continues to grow, yet these towns and the valley landscape have retained their traditional patterns, historic character and appeal. Linking it all together is the ever-present Susquehanna River, which has never been cleaner or more loved, for it both connects and defines the River Towns.

The strategic plan for achieving the vision is organized around a structure of goals, approaches, long-term initiatives, and pilot projects. The **Goals** provide a common thread throughout the recommendations. **Approaches** articulate a primary direction for the recommendations regarding the region or a specific community. **Initiatives** are longer-term actions that are likely to require more significant financial or leadership resources. **Pilot Projects** are meant to suggest examples of initiatives that are achievable relatively soon and that would benefit each of the River Towns.

Goals

Goal 1: Position the River Towns as thriving gateways to the natural beauty and recreation amenities of the Susquehanna. Recognize the potential gateway role of the River Towns and take steps to reinforce it. The Strategy suggests a new role for the towns as important gateways to the growing natural and recreational amenities emerging on both sides of the river, including the Susquehanna Greenway and the Susquehanna Heritage Park. These regional amenities will attract interest throughout the northeast and mid-Atlantic and could potentially increase the number of visitors and raise the profile of the River Towns for new development. Sites with water views or water access will become increasingly attractive for development. In such locations, inappropriate development – out of scale, using undistinguished materials, or poorly sited – could foreclose future opportunities and erode the sense of place. Municipalities should consider updating comprehensive plans and zoning ordinances to support retention of traditional character and scale. Having good planning regulations in place will signal to investors a climate of support for quality development that fits with the community's sense of place.

Goal 2: Strengthen connections between the towns and the river, physically

and in terms of community identity. The Susquehanna defines the River Towns communities; it is a powerful presence, the common and connecting element. It is driving opportunities for the towns, both through market forces (ex: retirees seeking housing near water and other amenities) and the interests of government (best exemplified by the Commonwealth's support of regional greenways and waterways). As such, the Strategy seeks to improve connections to the river physically, intellectually, and emotionally. This can happen in many ways. Interpretation should build from the role of the river in forming this region's identity. Wherever possible, recreation opportunities should include a link to the river or the river as a focal point. Business opportunities or public projects that can provide gathering places adjacent to or within walking distance of the river are encouraged. In many ways, the regionalism that is necessary to the success of the Strategy's implementation will be physically expressed through the connectivity provided around the river.

Goal 3: Bring the centers of these historic towns back to life. Development, business creation, and investment are needed in the central business districts of the River Towns. For these town centers, their strong historic character is a key competitive asset that should be built upon consciously, understanding the economic benefit of preservation-focused revitalization. Context-sensitive development that adaptively reuses historic buildings or includes sympathetic infill construction will complement the appealing character and scale of these communities. A multi-location "Main Street" revitalization program would be an excellent opportunity for collaboration among civic and government leaders in the River Towns.

Goal 4: Retain distinctions between the River Towns and the surrounding agricultural and natural landscape. Population growth has already begun to arrive in the region. Green fields and farm land are giving way to subdivisions. New housing along the edges of towns is especially common, as is standardized strip development along commercial corridors. As growth brings change, residents and leaders in the River Towns communities have expressed strong support for retaining the distinctiveness of "town" and "countryside" that is characteristic of this area, but that is being lost incrementally as suburban development continues along roadway corridors. Retaining the unique features of this region means rehabilitating older buildings to retain the historic fabric of the towns and taking steps to preserve the rural character in the landscape, especially those areas between towns along the river.

Goal 5: Heighten understanding of the history and heritage of the River Towns.

Each of the River Towns has both its own unique history and a shared history shaped by the presence of the river. There is increasing interest among the history and tourism groups in the region in making these stories more accessible to residents and visitors, thereby enhancing understanding and community pride. The Lancaster-York Heritage Region's interpretive themes provide a useful framework for presenting the stories of the River Towns. These interpretive themes are as follows:

- The *Bounty* of the land is due to the fertility of it and the temperate climate. History of agriculture in the region can be traced from the family farms of long ago through the mechanization of farm machinery, transportation, food processing and distribution. Food's place in local cultural and traditions is also explored as is the stewardship of the land that produces it.
- The theme *Ingenuity* looks at manufacturing, commerce and transportation, and how inventiveness coupled with the strong tradition and heritage of the people impacted these areas.
- *Freedom* addresses that which is fundamental to the American identity, from the immigrants of Europe looking for religious tolerance and the Underground Railroad used by African Americans escaping slavery to the wars that freed a nation, a people, and a world of oppressive regimes.
- *Towns and Countryside* provides a look at the towns and their distinctive development patterns of settlement in the region. The cultural and religious influences on each town's history and design are fully appreciated when immersed in the community life, festivals and celebrations of a town.
- The *Natural Wonders* theme features the Susquehanna River and its impact on the region's development, formation, and identity. The extensive natural resources of the area are also highlighted and include parks, preserves, sanctuaries, hiking trails, archeological sites, gorges, ravines, and water ways .

Recommendations for Wrightsville

Strengthening Wrightsville's commercial offerings will increase its potential as the gateway and location for a growing cluster of tourist-oriented things to see and do on the York County side of the river. Marinas and a popular outfitter are located south of town near Long Level, and the planned addition of the Susquehanna Heritage Park is expected to generate more visitor activity.

Of the three River Towns, Wrightsville has the most mature tourism market—it has had the longest running tourism patronage as a result of easy access to natural and recreational amenities appealing to both visitors and residents. Nearby, new residential developments are capitalizing on the region's natural beauty and cachet. Together, the visitor and resident populations represent a market opportunity for character-enhancing dining and retail offerings, particularly if new appropriately scaled residential housing can be introduced into the mix to boost the near-term spending capacity.

A number of Wrightsville's vacant or underutilized industrial buildings hold po-



Wrightsville's downtown offerings include a full-service grocery store and meat market.

tential for adaptive reuse in ways that would lead to increased market support. Some may make sense as residential units or lodging, both of which represent new real estate products that have been heretofore unavailable in this market. Adding

lodging accommodations to the mix would improve the visitor population's economic productivity to the region; instead of packing the car up and heading out of town to dinner and lodging, people could linger in Wrightsville and spend their dollars in the River Towns.

Approach: Establish Wrightsville as a place to go to, not through

In interviews and focus groups, Wrightsville residents unanimously expressed love for their hometown, citing a high quality of life, historic setting, and affordable cost of living. However, visitors and outsiders are confused by the layout of the main roadway, often finding they have passed through the town before they realize they have arrived. Although there are historic lime kilns, the popular John Wright Store and Restaurant, and a well-used community park, the town's assets can be invisible to those who do not know how to navigate the town. The recommendations in the Strategy seek to improve the borough's heritage tourism offerings and to establish better connectivity and navigability.

Long-Term Initiatives

Encourage more robust retail and restaurants, especially along Hellam Street.

Several businesses are located along Hellam Street in Wrightsville. However, it takes a cluster of vibrant businesses to motivate visitors and regional shoppers to get out of their cars and browse. Interviews with real estate brokers in the region indicated that better visibility and access would be likely to improve the market there. Revitalization usually takes an organized approach that involves property owners, businesses, and local government. Forming a downtown revitalization committee would help the town to organize Hellam Street property and business owners to work with the town to clean up the street, sidewalks, and public spaces, projecting a more inviting downtown image. It would also recruit and retain the types of businesses best suited to downtown's new role as properties become available. Office and professional services are appropriate uses for upper floors while street level floors are well-suited to retail and restaurant tenants.

Encourage appropriate infill development along North Front Street.

The adaptive reuse of historic buildings for housing, retail, and office uses is already occurring on North Front Street and should continue. There are also opportunity sites along the street—most of which are parking lots—that could accommodate new infill two-

four-story residential development or public uses, such as parks and recreation areas connected to the river, which would increase pedestrian traffic and the appeal for visitors. The parcels adjacent to the river are particularly important, and as they become available for conversion over time, their new uses should be considered carefully. A downtown revitalization committee would advocate for appropriate infill and would aid in acquiring tax credits and grants from the state. It would also provide a structure through which the borough could supply incentives for investments that follow basic design guidelines.

Create a pedestrian footbridge on the 1834 bridge supports. Wrightsville and Columbia have a unique resource in the connection and scenic views provided by the beautiful Veterans Memorial Bridge. The remnants of its predecessor—the old bridge supports just north of Veterans Memorial Bridge—are iconic structures offering a special opportunity for interaction with the Susquehanna. The pilings can easily support a pedestrian walkway extending out into the river. This would allow people—fisherman, sightseers, and history buffs among them—to walk out over the river, get close to the art deco bridge, and take in views of Columbia and Chickies Rock. Building a full pedestrian/bike bridge crossing of the river could be a long-term ideal. Creating a pedestrian pier would require a collaborative effort led by the borough, Rivertownes, and the Heritage Region as well as the cooperation of property owners at the end of the bridge and West Hempfield Township, which has jurisdiction over the river.



Civil war-era bridge pilings are visible just north of the Veterans Memorial Bridge.

Redevelop the historic Veterans Memorial Bridge administration building to serve a more public function. The original Route 462 bridge was a significant engineering achievement. Only one historic building from the bridge’s original period remains, located at the west end of the crossing just to the south of the right-of-way. The stone building is owned by the borough and currently used by the American Legion. Should that use change, a more public purpose related to the bridge and the Susquehanna River should be considered. An ideal approach would be a visitor center, perhaps sharing space with an appropriate community group or an outfitter or other visitor-oriented service business that could staff it. As owner, the borough is the logical lead for re-imagining how the building can be used in the future.



To the south of Veterans Memorial Bridge in Wrightsville is the original bridge administration building, which might someday become a visitor center.

Pilot Projects

Create a gateway zone at the west end of Veterans Memorial Bridge. The intersection of Second and Hellam Streets at the eastbound entry to Veterans Memorial Bridge is difficult to navigate and poses safety risks to pedestrians and drivers. Borough residents, business owners, and council members emphasized the need to improve safety and legibility at this intersection and a local support group has begun to meet to discuss an approach for implementation. The first step, working through the borough, is to request a traffic study through the York County Planning Commission, for the improvements will be based on traffic volumes, vehicle types, and roadway capacity.

Meanwhile, the borough and PennDOT could do a temporary test of the effectiveness of lane changes and other adjustments by using paint—road striping to reroute and calm traffic. PennDOT will be key to achieving this recommendation. A moderate approach would include raised and/or colored crosswalks and bump-outs or splitter islands to visually reduce the paved area. A longer term approach might include a roundabout—an urban compact or single-lane traffic circle, or a hybrid of the two—to create an entrance effect for vehicles traveling in both directions, while constructively slowing traffic, providing safe pedestrian crossings, and increasing safety for turning vehicles. PennDOT’s “Guide to Roundabouts” notes that well-designed roundabouts can have benefits in appearance, safety, capacity, reduced delays, and traffic calming.

Improve the pedestrian appeal of Front Street. Front Street is Wrightsville’s link to the riverfront, and as such, it should reflect the best that the borough has to offer, presenting an inviting community image. The street would benefit from litter removal and clean up, new curbs, and sidewalks on both sides of the street, lighting, and landscaping. Redesign and better landscaping and screening would improve the appearance of parking lots located along the roadway. In addition, the historic lime kilns, which are owned by the borough, have an interpretive panel installed on nearby land and are in need of restoration. The borough can apply for funding for most of these improvements - several state programs are available.

In addition to Front Street parking and streetscape recommendations, River Park improvements would further enhance the public face of Wrightsville. Improve the park landscaping to enhance views from the park to river as well as into the park from the river and Front Street. With the historic canals still in place, there is an opportunity to enhance these structures and provide interpretation, making them a public amenity. Pedestrian trails throughout the park could connect ball fields, riverfront, and play areas with the proposed boardwalk on the historic piers. Implementation of the park and Front Street improvements will create a community asset by reconnecting both ends of Front Street with useable/desirable park space for all ages.

Interpretive Approach

The Susquehanna and Tidewater Canal ran between Wrightsville and Havre de Grace, Maryland. There are remnants of the canal still visible in the town’s riverfront park. As such, it is recommended that the borough lead an effort to restore the historic canal beds, provide interpretive panels that describe the engineering feat of the canals in their time and the impact they had on the region’s economy.

The Lancaster County Heritage program provides an **auto tour and guide** entitled “River Towns and Roadside Stops” that includes the River Towns on the east side of the river. Led by the Heritage Region and Rivertownes, Wrightsville, Long Level, and Accomac should work with the York County Heritage Trust and the York County Planning Commission’s new York County Heritage program to develop a similar approach to the west side of the river and maybe even create a joint publication that guides visitors to and around the River Towns on both sides of the Susquehanna. Further development of this approach could include a regional audio tour based on the joint auto tour and guide of the River Towns.

A **high-quality walking tour** would bring the borough’s history to life and could also be produced in audio format. The borough would lead this effort.

Bridge Landing, Wrightsville



Where Hellam St., Second St. and the bridge entrance come together is unsafe for pedestrians and can be confusing to drivers.



Option 1: Crosswalks and better definition of the space with streetscaping would also make a more attractive town gateway.



Option 2: A traffic roundabout is another option that could better organize the functions and spaces of the intersection and add a distinctive gateway feature.

South Front Street, Wrightsville



The public park on South Front Street is not inviting to pedestrians despite being close to the heart of town. The park's edge emphasizes the haphazard parking area and detracts from the park and the historic houses adjacent to it.



The addition of landscaping and street trees, sidewalks, tree and brush pruning, and park walking trails would provide a more aesthetically pleasing and usable environment.

Recommendations for Columbia

Downtown Columbia's relatively compact urban fabric, historic streetscapes and accessible scale—coupled with easy access to Route 30 and lovely views to the Susquehanna River—speak to its potential role as a commercial center serving the region's retail and business needs. Columbia's walkable scale lends itself to housing for empty nesters and others who prefer walkable neighborhoods. The proximity to good health care facilities further supports this market. Columbia's historic character—its buildings, streetscape and scale—is an asset that can also be reinforced through the adaptive reuse of some of the larger buildings that speak to the community's industrial heritage.

Approach: Attract people to live, work, and shop in downtown

The focus for Columbia is to bring life and activity back to the center of town by enhancing its appeal for residential and commercial uses. Columbia is the most urban of the River Towns, and the town was once bustling with commercial activity. Today, its commercial streets are less active than many residents and borough leaders would like. Likewise, although neighborhoods around downtown are strong, quality residential offerings in the central business district are limited. When the impact of heavy truck traffic is diminished through the relocation of Route 441, downtown will be positioned to become a more desirable place to live, work, and shop.

Long-Term Initiatives

Encourage housing in downtown. Encourage appropriately scaled new housing in and near downtown. Markets for condominiums and other urban housing types are on the rise as empty nesters and healthy, active retirees seek environments that offer lifestyle amenities. Columbia has an opportunity to bring vibrancy to its downtown through fresh residential offerings that appeal to these markets. At the same time, care should be taken to ensure new development fits within the traditional scale and character of town; this is especially important for parcels in the historic town center and along the river. The borough would be wise to create and adopt thoughtful urban design guidelines to define good infill development and encourage develop-

ers to build with Columbia's historic town character in mind. Providing incentives such as low-interest loans or property tax abatement could attract good projects that begin to set the standard.

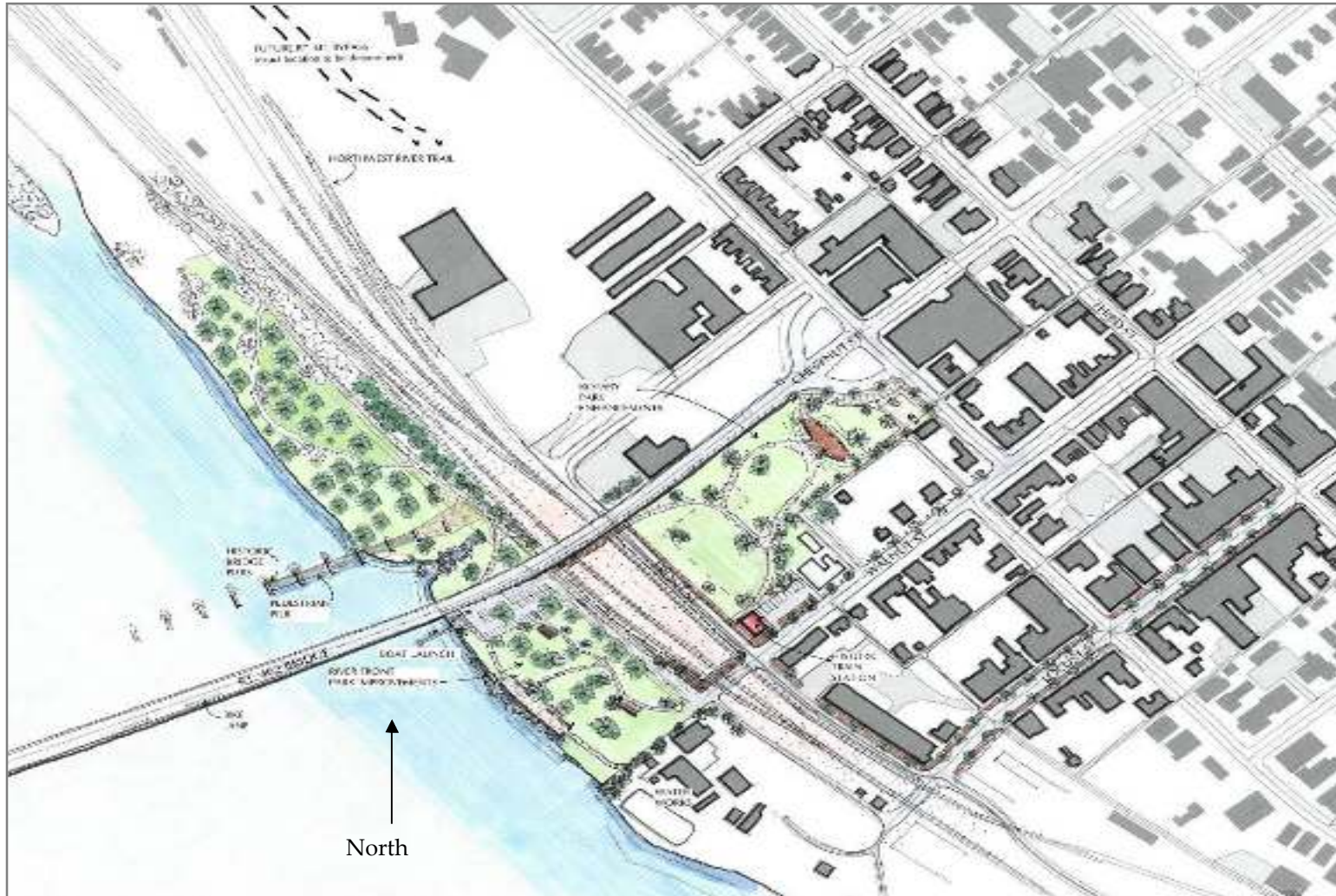
Encourage growth in businesses complementary to downtown's strengths, including the redevelopment of the upper stories of commercial buildings.

More housing in and around the town center will bring new residents, who translate into new markets for downtown businesses. Downtown Columbia would benefit from increased commercial activity and quality, for some buildings are vacant or marginally used and need the investment in rehabilitation that often accompanies commercial success. The vitality that new or improved retail, dining, and other commercial offerings can bring promises to enliven the streets. Another means for bringing activity to downtown—in both business establishments and possible patrons for commercial offerings—is the redevelopment of upper stories for office or residential use. The local effort to establish a Main Street Program for Columbia can provide a vehicle for accomplishing these goals through funding and technical assistance on a range of issues, including business recruitment and retention, signage, historic preservation, street-scaping, promotion/ marketing, and organizing for action. It would also be a potential partner to encourage housing in downtown.



Columbia's downtown offers a variety of building types well-suited to redevelopment for retail or dining at the street level and office or residential uses in the upper floors.

Columbia Pilot Projects



Pilot project recommendations for Columbia are intended to leverage the town's planned investment in River Park. Better connections through green space acquisition should properly between the two parks become available — as well as improved streetscaping are included. In addition, a pedestrian pier on the historic bridge supports is suggested as an addition to the park plan.

Pilot Projects

Improve the Locust Street Corridor from the riverfront to Third Street.

Locust Street serves as one of the primary connecting corridors between Third Street (the primary access to downtown) and the riverfront area. This stretch would benefit from a variety of streetscape improvements, such as new sidewalks, additional street trees, and banners. Once implemented, improvements to Locust Street could serve as a model for improving other downtown corridors. In public workshops, residents, and leaders from Columbia expressed strong support for this recommendation as a priority pilot project. The borough's Main Street Advisory Committee was named as the likely leader for such an effort.

Enhance Rotary Park and connect it to the existing riverfront via a greenway.

The two parks most accessible from downtown—Rotary Park and the River Park— would benefit from being better connected. Rotary Park is located on Chestnut Street at the eastern end of the Veterans Memorial Bridge, adjacent to downtown and only a block from River Park. There may be a long-term opportunity to make a green connection to the river and River Park. Extending Rotary Park west along the south side of the Veterans Memorial Bridge would create a space that offers views of the river, paths, benches, gardens, and a gateway directly from downtown Columbia to River Park. A possible long-term action could include expansion of the park land to provide a continuous green space between the river and downtown; this is possible should industrial/commercial buildings south of Rotary Park become available. The historic train station could provide a public or commercial reuse. An improved connection would serve a dual purpose: it would increase the amount and impact of open space at the riverfront, and it would better connect the downtown to the river. Columbia Borough government would lead any efforts related to the parks.



Locust Street serves as one of the primary connecting corridors between Third Street (the primary access to downtown) and the riverfront area.



Rotary Park is located on Chestnut Street at the eastern end of the Veterans Memorial Bridge.

Rotary Park, Columbia



Columbia is a compact, dense town with limited green space. Two pleasant green spaces (Rotary Park and the River Park) are not far from one another, but are separated by railroad tracks and an undistinguished industrial building.



If industrial buildings south of Rotary Park become available, the Borough might consider purchasing the space for a green connection. A safer pedestrian and auto crossing of the railroad tracks would enhance the appeal of planned River Park improvements.

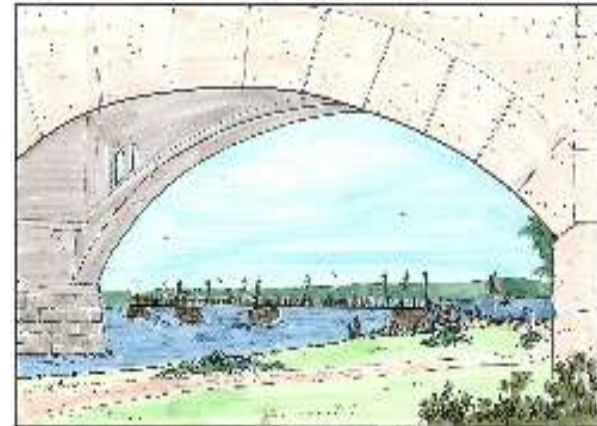
Create a pedestrian footbridge on the historic bridge supports. A walkway that extends into the Susquehanna River on three or more of the historic bridge supports would enhance views west to Wrightsville and would allow users to fully appreciate Veterans Memorial Bridge. This could be an important step in the long-term River Park plan to increase Columbia’s connection to the river. Success in this pilot project would require collaboration between Columbia Borough and West Hempfield Township, which has jurisdiction over the river at Columbia. An eventual goal for this recommendation could be the connection of Wrightsville and Columbia via a pedestrian/bike way that fully crosses the river on the historic supports.

Interpretive Approach

Columbia has had a colorful history as a true river town—it is described as “rough” and “rowdy” during its heyday, with a reputation as “river rats,” according to several residents. The town continues to have a reputation as a gritty place. This aspect to river town living—the predominantly male, bawdy and often tough culture that surrounds hard industrial work—is an untold part of the River Towns history. By acknowledging and claiming that history, the River Towns can positively redefine what it means to be a “river rat” today: bringing back the quality of the Susquehanna and its towns. The Strategy recommends that as future interpretive materials are developed for Columbia, the impacts of river living on its past and current culture be explored. The Heritage Region and Rivertownes would lead this effort.

Geology holds great potential for interpretation between Columbia, Marietta and Washington Boro. The geologic formations north and south of Columbia are very visible and quite striking compared to much of what a visitor to central Pennsylvania typically sees. The Heritage Region and Rivertownes would lead this effort.

A **high-quality walking tour** would give voice to the town’s historic buildings and could even be produced in audio format. Columbia Borough would lead this effort.



The historic stone footings nearest to both shores could support a wooden pedestrian pier for strolling and enjoying views of the river and the handsome arches of Veterans Memorial Bridge.



Hinkle's Pharmacy and Restaurant in Columbia helps define the character of the town, a place where locals regularly gather and interact.

Recommendations for Marietta

Marietta's historic housing stock evidences extensive reinvestment and attention. The town's population, the workforce employed at the nearby pharmaceutical facility and new families moving into residential developments at the edges of town suggest new and expanded market needs that could be met by retail and restaurant development in downtown Marietta. Moreover, the town's strong historic character and proposed river trail are assets that will deliver visitors – and their dollars – to Marietta. Right now, downtown Marietta's commercial spaces do little to meet the needs of the community's core residents, downtown workers, or visitors. Attracting dining, retail, and other goods and services to the commercial core of town would respond to the needs of local residents, including senior citizens, and visitors while increasing Marietta's vitality by adding life to the city's sidewalks.

Approach: Leverage new river trail and town's market position

Marietta has little vacancy, well-maintained historic houses, and strong community pride. The planned Northwest Lancaster County River Trail promises to increase exposure of the town's charms to regional residents and visitors. However, there are currently few commercial businesses, and hence, few opportunities to capture their dollars or meet their needs. The Strategy aims to create stronger connections throughout Marietta and its outskirts and to strengthen the commercial viability of downtown, in part through the additional activity provided by the trail.

While the planned levee along the river is needed for flood control, the potential visual impact it may have on the natural and historic resources along the waterfront is a concern among some residents. If it is well-designed and sensitive to the character of the surrounding area, the project could not only protect from flooding, but also bring opportunities for trail and other recreation resources for the borough. In particular, the need for a levee maintenance road coincides with interest by trail advocates in connecting the Northwest Lancaster County River Trail through Marietta.

Long Term Initiatives

Encourage appropriate region-serving commercial activity near the town square and along Market Street. Downtown Marietta has a well-regarded fine restaurant and a few taprooms. It lacks mid-range casual or family-style dining; bakery, café, or coffee shop establishments; and seasonal offerings, such as ice cream. More diverse offerings will better position downtown Marietta to tap growing regional markets. Additional business ventures in downtown would serve tourists, users of the new trail, and the residents of Marietta, neighboring East Donegal Township, and—with the right mix and proper promotion—residents of the entire region. A downtown development committee or Main Street effort would be the ideal lead on this recommendation. The borough government could also take the lead.



Marietta's central business district is comprised of well-maintained historic buildings.

Redevelop Gay Street between the Susquehanna River and the town square with retail and dining. As opportunities arise to develop underutilized areas or to redevelop buildings and building sites along this section of Gay Street, it would be advantageous to create better connections and economic activity in the downtown. The focus for this recommendation is on mixed use, with retail or restaurant use at the street level and residential or office use in upper stories. Potential long-term redevelopment sites include the laundromat on the square and the American Legion parking lot. Should the opportunity eventually arise, each of these sites offers high visibility and significant size. Regional real estate professionals indicate that more retail and restaurant uses would be feasible due to the town's strong residential population and spending power. Implementing organizations could include a downtown development committee, a Main Street effort, or the borough.

Marietta Pilot Projects



The planned Northwest Lancaster County Trail provides the impetus for Marietta's pilot project recommendations. Opportunities to entice trail users into town, thereby supporting downtown businesses, can be realized through improved connections between the riverfront and Market Street. Likewise, expanded interpretive programming at the Vesta Furnace site could entice trail users to stop in Marietta.

Create better physical connections between the borough's downtown and surrounding jurisdictions. It can be difficult for those unfamiliar with the town's layout to navigate when arriving into downtown from the north. Both Market Street, Marietta's main street, and Route 441, the main access to Marietta, are east-west oriented and run parallel. Only four north-south roads fully connect the core commercial district with the primary commercial corridor on Route 441: Waterford Avenue, Gay Street, Bridge Street, and Decatur Street to the far west. Well-designed wayfinding signage (see downtown York and Lancaster for good examples) along Market Street and Route 441 could significantly improve connections for visitors unfamiliar with Ma-

rietta. The borough government and PennDOT would lead any efforts around signage and changes to roadways.

Pilot Projects

Develop an interpretive experience at the Musselman/Vesta Furnace site, a logical resting place on the Northwest Lancaster County River Trail, and connect it to town from the river. The Musselman/Vesta Furnace office building, located at the northern end of the Chickies Historic District and the Chickies Rock County Park, is the last remaining vestige of the very large

iron furnace that once thrived on Marietta's riverfront. The Musselman/Vesta Furnace was one of eight anthracite furnaces operating between Marietta and Columbia. Its fascinating ruins provide opportunities to interpret the iron industry that thrived all along the Susquehanna in the River Towns region. Rivertownes recently installed an interpretive panel at the site. Additional interpretive efforts could include displays in the building's windows, audio installations (the sounds of a foundry and furnaces, voices of workers, etc.), and tours. Cleaning out overgrown vegetation and sensitive landscape treatment to delineate some park-like areas would encourage trail users, residents, and others to experience the site and learn its history. Careful consideration must be given to ruins and archaeological remains, including posting sensitive areas that should not be disturbed.

As the Musselman/Vesta Furnace site becomes more known, connections between that site and the central business district will be increasingly desirable. Signage and safe pedestrian/bike ways, perhaps along the trail, would provide a link between the two. Marietta Restoration Associates holds a lease on the property, which is one of five public buildings for which they are responsible. Currently in Phase II of rehabilitation, work is being carried out by the Vesta Committee, with approval of the County as owner, following the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. In 2007, the 4th Annual Pig Iron Fest was held. The main purpose is free public education about the local 19th century iron industry and its relationship to that industry statewide. Information is also featured about the Susquehanna River, natural history and geology. Funds for building rehabilitation are raised from food sales.

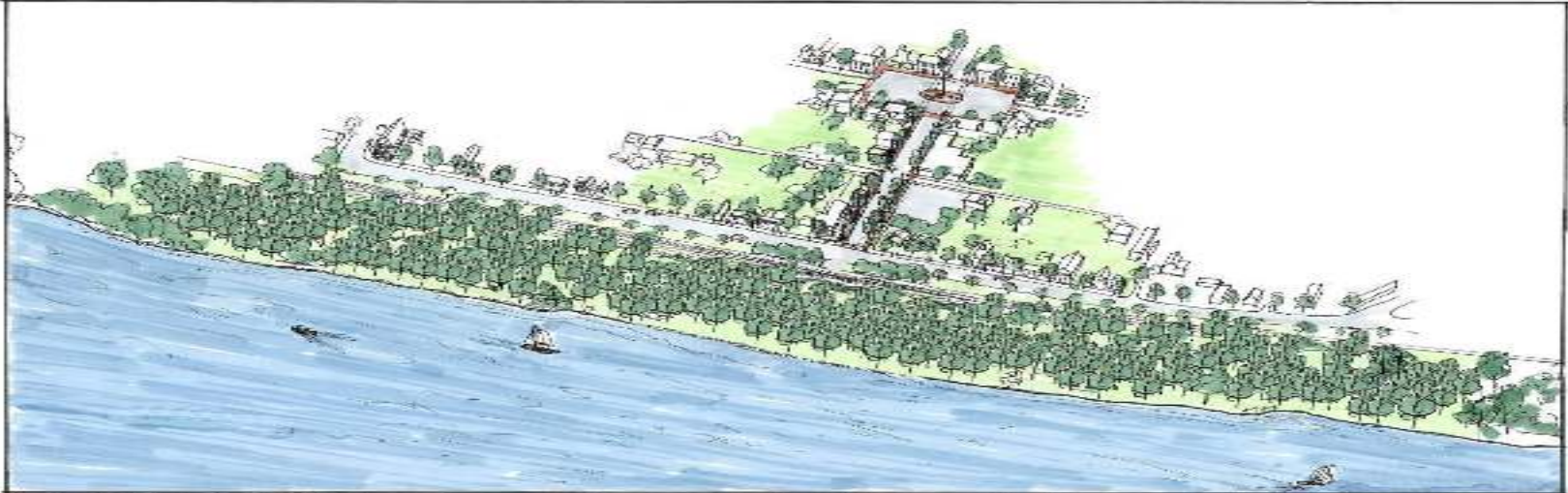
Improve Gay Street as a connection between Front Street and the River and the town square. While locals view the S-Bend where the original two towns met as the center of town, the urban form of Marietta suggests the intersection of Gay and Market Streets at the town square as the center of town, a sense reinforced in how newcomers and visitors often regard the square as the town center. In addition, Gay Street offers one of the few crossovers to the riverfront. To better define these spaces, streetscape improvements are recommended for Gay Street, including new sidewalks, additional street trees, landscaping along flat pavement or undefined edges, and banners. A downtown development committee, a Main Street effort, or the borough could serve as the lead implementing organization.

Strengthen future connection with NW Lancaster County Trail at Gay Street and Front Street intersection. When the trail is completed, foot traffic into Marietta could be enhanced by the addition of comfort amenities aimed at bicyclists and other riverfront users. Because of flooding and water management issues on the river side of the railroad embankment, the recommended location for these improvements is the intersection of Front and Gay Streets. Amenities might include a comfort station/bathroom, bike racks, and modest river access for kayaks or canoes. Signage at the trail would be helpful to those seeking such facilities. At public presentations, Marietta residents have responded positively to the concept of a town-trail connection. The borough would lead the planning, design, and installation of public facilities.



The Vesta Furnace site includes the furnace's historic office building and worker housing.

Gay Street, Marietta



Street trees and enhanced lighting elements would better connect the river to the town at the pleasant intersection where Gay and Market Street suggest the traditional public space known as a Penn diamond, common in Pennsylvania towns.



Gay Street is a natural connection between downtown Marietta and the river, especially when the Northwest Lancaster County River Trail becomes a regional amenity along the river. Gay Street could have an improved appeal for pedestrians.



The addition of street trees, better scaled light fixtures and more attractive sidewalks would better connect the town square, Front Street and the trail. The town square, while not locally regarded as the "town center," feels to visitors like a traditional square, with an island and streetscaping.

Interpretive Approach

The **Chickies Historic District**—almost 600 acres dotted with 52 contributing buildings, sites, and structures—has recently been added to the National Register of Historic Places. This resource would now benefit from robust interpretive programs to bring the remains of its colorful industrial past to life. Rivertownes sponsors periodic tours of the iron furnace sites and the remaining furnace and has placed an interpretive panel in the district that describes the Henry Clay Furnace and the Musselman/Vesta Furnace Office. The Pig Iron Fest celebrates the history of the iron industry in Marietta and takes place at Chickies; this event could expand its storytelling and include the early iron industry and its role in the region, for Vesta and Chickies are illustrative of what was happening elsewhere in the River Towns. For example, the rise and fall of iron smelting in Marietta mirrored the patterns of other industries reliant on the canals and railroads for transport. Chickies is now a largely natural setting with ruins from its industrial days, making it difficult to imagine the sounds and smells of a booming and noisy industry. Audio installations featuring the sounds and voices of its heyday would add significantly to the visitor experience. A vivid audio tour of the area for walkers and hikers has potential as well.

Geology-focused interpretation could be quite successful at Chickies Rock. The anticline (easily seen from the park) has geological significance, and the geology of the region is an important part of the river's history, influencing how it was formed and the birth of the iron industry.

The town's walking tour could be revised and produced as an **audio walking tour**.

Marietta Restoration Associates and Rivertownes PA USA are the appropriate co-leads for implementation of recommendations concerning interpretation.

Outlying Communities: Context & Recommendations

Much like each of the three primary River Towns is unique in history, character, and assets, each of the outlying communities also contributes something special to the river region, and the Strategy includes suggested pilot projects for these areas.

Long Level

Add interpretive signage about the Susquehanna and Tidewater Canal at the river's edge in Long Level. The shore in Long Level affords a good opportunity to present the importance of the Susquehanna and Tidewater Canal in the evolution of the River Towns region. Shank's Mare Outfitters is a popular business and a location in front of its facility would reach the region's growing number of recreational users. Rivertownes and the owners of Shank's Mare would lead completion of this recommendation.

Explore new public uses for the grassy area on the riverbank at Long Level. Long Level Road currently ends in a turnaround with an inviting view and riverside location. Adding passive recreation facilities like picnic tables, a pavilion and a couple of parking spaces could lead to fuller utilization of the area. This site is appropriate for interpretive installation addressing the PA-MD Border Wars (also known as Cresap's War) and the Blue Rock Ferry that existed in colonial times between Long Level and Washington Boro. A possible lead for implementation of this recommendation is the Safe Harbor Water Power Corporation and the Lancaster-York Heritage Region.

Develop the Susquehanna Heritage Park and Susquehanna Discovery Center. This scenic park, visitor education center and heritage resource is in the planning stages now, led by the Lancaster - York Heritage Region. The park and Discovery Center have the potential to serve as gateway visitor facilities for the Susquehanna River Gorge.

Washington Boro

Interpret the key stories of Washington Boro in the community's riverfront park. Washington Boro has a long history that is not easily apparent to one driving along River Road; the town's form today is a partial picture of the historic community. At the same time, the Washington Boro Community Park provides a beloved local recreational resource and views of the river adjacent to River Road. The Strategy recommends adding an interpretive installation to the park, perhaps centered on how its location on the river has shaped settlement patterns for hundreds of years—from Native American times (with the Susquehannocks) to Colonial times (Blue Rock Ferry and Pennsylvania-Mary-

land Border Wars) to today. Interpretive materials could include historical information as well as a description of more contemporary stories, such as the Safe Harbor Dam project and the impact of higher water levels on the town and the culture of Washington Boro today. This would be a timely project, for 2007 was the 400th anniversary of James Smith's exploration and Jamestown's settlement, bringing additional attention to the history of the Susquehannocks. Washington Boro is within Manor Township, which would be the lead for this recommendation.

Explore the potential for eco-tourism. The islands in the river at Washington Boro are a unique bird habitat ranked as exceptional by the Audubon Society. They are also featured in the Heritage Region's *Water Trail Map and Guide* and the Pennsylvania Audubon's *Susquehanna River Birding and Wildlife Trail*. Eco-tourism is a growing market, especially birding. The River Towns area offers the potential to develop overnight primitive camp sites that may appeal to birding enthusiasts and paddlers. Potential projects in the Washington Boro area that would benefit the River Towns region include providing linkages and connections to the existing Turkey Hill hiking trail and developing the Atglen-Susquehanna rail trail as a connection to and from the River Towns.

Accomac

Protect the scenic and natural resources of Accomac. Accomac is located in an area that has been designated as a Continuous Canopy Woodland Corridor Reservation by Hellam Township, a designation that reflects a concern for protection of this relatively undeveloped, steeply sloped and scenic area, which borders the Susquehanna River for many miles. These woodlands provide an extensive corridor of contiguous woodlands vital to a healthy ecosystem that prewildlife habitat and recreational opportunities. The Accomac area includes unique scenic and natural features, such as Wildcat Falls, Schulls Rock, Roundtop and Hellam Point, as well as Pennsylvania Natural Diversity Inventory sites in the river floodplain, a designated High Quality/Cold Water fishery stream (Trout Run) and a significant stretch of the Mason-Dixon Trail.

Promote Accomac to niche markets for dining. Located on the river, Accomac Inn has received numerous awards for its culinary offerings and wine selection. The scenic and historic setting make the Inn an ideal addition to packages and tours aimed at travelers and regional residents with upscale



Accomac Inn has received numerous awards for its culinary offerings and wine selection.

preferences. The Lancaster-York Heritage Region and local Convention and Visitors Bureaus would be the lead for this recommendation with partnership from the Accomac Inn.



Resources for River Towns start with the region's youth, for they are the future.

Regional Recommendations

Regional planning reflects the premise that markets and consumers behave based on factors reflecting economic and experiential values that pay little heed to jurisdictional boundaries and municipal identities. If issues and opportunities operate on a regional scale, then strategies to capitalize or mitigate them ought to be approached regionally as well. Taken individually, the three River Towns are three small markets; from a regional perspective, they can be three interconnected activity centers offering distinct experiences and opportunities to visitors, residents, and employers.

Increase cooperation and communication between the River Towns. To remain competitive in today's global economy requires rethinking traditional ways of operating. While each of the towns is distinct and likely to remain so, savvy communities around Pennsylvania and the nation are forming regional alliances and partnerships based on cooperation and common goals. Regional cooperation can take many forms and all are encouraged by state funding programs and other potential funders. Investors and business location scouts respond positively to evidence of strong regional cooperation, too. True collaboration will better leverage effort and enable the River Towns' small boroughs and communities to be more competitive for funding and to develop projects with greater impact. In addition, residents of all the communities have repeatedly expressed support for "boundary crossing" on the part of local government leaders. Several noted that the workshops sponsored by the Strategy planning process represented for some their first meaningful interactions with the other jurisdictions.

A recommended first step is to undertake logical partnership efforts among the River Towns, jointly supporting each other's applications for grant support, and taking turns in the timing of funding requests. Sponsoring periodic joint meetings of civic groups and town / borough councils and having a more robust joint website with a shared calendar and project updates are a few ways Rivertownes and the Heritage Region can encourage stronger collaboration. When experience confirms the benefits from crossing boundaries and working together, the municipalities might undertake more challenging projects.

Another achievable early step is the consolidation of complementary events,

such as heritage days or historic homes tours, and the establishment of collaborative events. For example, a River Towns festival that includes events in each of the River Towns and outlying communities would raise the profile of the region as a destination while also giving the communities experience in working together for heritage tourism purposes.

Leverage complementary initiatives whenever possible. There are many initiatives underway that promise to impact the River Towns communities. Some of them overlap or could be made more effective through coordination. The Lancaster-York Heritage Region continues to develop and market heritage tourism experiences. The *Pennsylvania Civil War Trails* initiative is capitalizing on a range of tourism assets to keep visitors in central PA for longer periods, and the River Towns are one of seven gateway communities for this PA Tourism Office initiative. Also, the *Artist and Artisan Trails* initiative, sponsored by the same agency, has a focus on river towns. Local history and preservation groups, such as Marietta Restoration Associates, continue to designate, rehabilitate, and interpret historic structures like the Musselman/Vesta Furnace Office Building. The Heritage Region helped fund a yearlong celebration and educational series organized by the historical societies of both counties, entitled "Along the Susquehanna", which examined the role of the river in the region's history, culture, and economy. RiverFest, now in its 6th year, is sponsored by Rivertownes PA USA and is held the last Sunday in June. RiverFest brings music and art to the shores of the River along with Civil War activities, exhibits, historic displays, food and fun. These are but a few examples of initiatives that will enhance the area's profile, quality of life for residents, attractiveness for visitors, and competitiveness for business or residential relocation. By connecting with these projects, groups involved in implementing the recommendations of the Strategy will gain greater mileage from their own activities. With limited leadership and financial resources, greater collaboration could make a big difference in terms of leverage.

Identify and retain what is important to residents as the region changes and population grows. Population growth is happening in the region and change is a constant force at work in every community; however, it is an incremental force that modifies places over time. Familiar settings are often taken for granted and can disappear or change radically in incremental ways. Through-

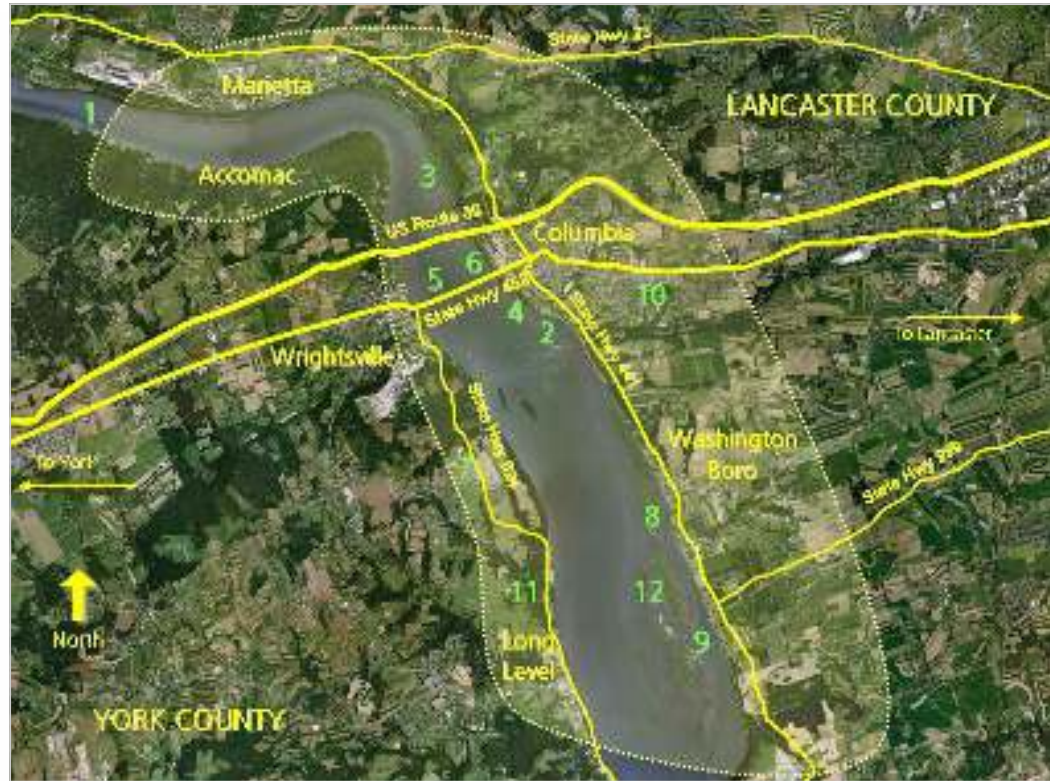
out the Strategy process, residents have expressed the desire to use the benefits of growth to strengthen the sense of time and place that characterizes the region, while avoiding the erosion that is the unintended consequence of not planning ahead. Those communities that proactively plan, embracing changes that they desire and protecting aspects that are most important to their identity as a place, thrive through transformation over time. The River Towns communities will benefit from planning for the arrival of new households, the shifting of economic realities and markets, and the development of a more extensive recreational and natural resource base. Conservation and preservation incentives and programs will be important tools for accomplishing this.

Embrace the River Towns’ role as a regional gateway. As the state, the counties, and conservation groups work to protect utility lands and create major linear greenways and parks along both sides of the Susquehanna River, these historic towns can become natural gateways, providing services and goods needed by visitors. Revitalized town centers and pleasantly scaled residential neighborhoods can complement conservation lands and regional recreation amenities.

Regional initiatives envision collaboration among the River Towns and their civic, business, and government leaders. Benefits of such initiatives will serve each community while greatly enhancing the regional whole.

Position the River Towns as a distinct identity and location choice to capture future market and economic opportunities. Few places along the Susquehanna River offer both access to the river *and* visitor support services. Several projects are underway—a riverside trail in Lancaster County, a riverfront park in Columbia, and improvements to the riverfront park in Wrightsville, to name a few—that will increase the towns’ interaction with and offerings along the Susquehanna. A logical next step will be to capitalize on these changes while improving the existing amenities and adding additional visitor

Complementary Initiatives



- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Susquehanna Greenway | 7. Susquehanna Heritage Park |
| 2. Route 441 Routing | 8. Susquehanna River Access Project |
| 3. NW Lancaster County River Trail | 9. Blue Rock Heritage Center |
| 4. Columbia River Park | 10. State Route 462 Scenic Byway Designation |
| 5. Rt. 462 Veterans Memorial Bridge Lighting | 11. State Route 624 Scenic Byway Designation |
| 6. River Loop Scenic Biking & Driving Route | 12. Shared Utility-Owned Lands |

services, especially an array of lodging alternatives geared to the region's visitor markets.

Undertake and support projects that connect the River Towns communities physically, thematically, & emotionally. In order to provide visitors and regional residents with a critical mass of choices and activities, the River Towns must function more akin to one community with several "nodes" rather than as several disconnected towns and outlying jurisdictions. Each "node" plays a distinct role in the region, thereby creating a place—the region—that offers a whole experience and quality of life. Better connections are needed to achieve this: interpretation can provide thematic connection, working together can strengthen trust and collegiality connections, and trails, signage, maps, transportation options, and more can provide better physical connections.

Create safe bicycling routes and pedestrian trails. Although the region is very scenic and bucolic, its winding and hilly roads can be unsafe for walking and biking. The addition of a system of lanes and trails would allow for more recreation to take place along the river and would provide physical connections among the River Towns. Safe on-road bicycling lanes may be a first, low-cost step toward achieving this system, and the later development of bicycle/pedestrian trails would complete it.

Retain the towns' historical scale and scenic context, especially the sensitive lands along the river. As the River Towns are discovered and appreciated for their abundant historic fabric and peaceful landscapes, development pressures will rise. Proactive planning is necessary to preserve the scale, patterns, and presence of nature that characterize the region. This will require coordinated action on the part of boroughs, townships, and counties, and calls for a menu of incentives as well as regulatory changes.



Residents enjoy the Susquehanna on a summer afternoon.

Regional Pilot Projects

Expand interpretive programming in the River Towns region, incorporating the Susquehanna River more robustly and using the Lancaster-York Heritage Region's interpretive framework as a guide. The story themes of the Heritage Region's interpretive framework were developed through an extensive process in which the region's historians, naturalists, and educators were very active. To the degree possible, interpretive programming—whether audio or walking tours, exhibits, participatory demonstrations and reenactments, or text panels near key sites—should derive from these themes and in so doing, will provide residents and visitors with strong context for understanding the importance of the communities and their surrounding natural systems.

Groundwork for weaving the river into the region's interpretive programming is being laid by the Strategy's pilot projects, many of which include an interpretive facet that relates to the Susquehanna and its communities. The Heritage Region will lead this recommendation as the regional interpretive and heritage marketing entity. Some additional interpretive activities are recommended as follows:

- Existing tours and guides should be converted to digital format and made available as downloads from the Heritage Region's website, either through a central file of links to different places where the items can be saved or as a central repository of the items.
- The Heritage Region should provide a calendar and clearinghouse function for interpretive events, festivals, etc. in the region.
- Teacher trainings using the region's history should be made available online.
- An annual heritage conference that includes high school projects, a lecture series, discussion groups, tours, hands-on restoration experiences, and more could enlighten and involve more people than are reached by traditional interpretive activities.

Section Three:

Resources, Priorities, and Next Steps

To implement the recommendations of the Strategy, a list of potential funding sources is included in this section. Priorities for implementation are outlined along with recommended steps for moving the plan forward.



Funding

Pennsylvania's Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and Department of Community and Economic Development are likely to be primary funders and partners in many of the Strategy's recommended actions. The missions and future directions of these agencies are well aligned with the greenway-based and collaborative regional approach laid out in this strategy.

Main Street (Department of Community and Economic Development) is the state's headline downtown revitalization program. It provides technical assistance and operating funds at \$115,000 over a 5-year period to designated communities. Programs are also eligible for downtown reinvestment grants up to \$250,000 with a required match. See: <http://www.newpa.com/programDetail.aspx?id=79>

Elm Street (Department of Community and Economic Development) is the state's neighborhood revitalization program modeled on Main Street. Designation provides technical assistance and eligibility for start-up administrative and staffing funds for a local Elm Street organization - \$225,000 over a 5-year period. Funds are also available for planning and revitalization activities through "residential reinvestment" grants, which allow for a broad range of activities. See: <http://www.newpa.com/programDetail.aspx?id=74>

Growing Greener II – Main Street and Downtown Redevelopment Grants (Department of Community and Economic Development) can be given to municipalities or to nonprofits and are targeted at aiding downtown redevelopment efforts through a focus on buildings and sites. Business development and public improvements are also eligible. Pre-development, acquisition, and capital costs are all allowable. Grants do not carry a minimum or maximum, but they typically range between \$250,000 and \$500,000. See: <http://www.newpa.com/programDetail.aspx?id=128>

The **Community Conservation Partnership Program (C2P2)** is an umbrella program under the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources that provides a range of grants using various state funding pools, including Growing Greener funds. See: <http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/brc/grants/>

A selection of C2P2 grants that could apply to the River Towns includes:

- *River Grants* seek to conserve and enhance river resources. This is defined to include planning for significant natural and cultural resources and implementing approved river conservation plans.
- *Rails-to-Trails Grants* pay 50% toward development of rails-to-trails corridors.

- *Land Trust Grants* provide 50% toward acquiring or planning open space and natural areas under threat.
- *Heritage Areas Grants* promote public-private partnerships and focus on preserving and enhancing natural, cultural, historic, and recreation resources.

The **Community Revitalization Program** (Department of Community and Economic Development) supports community stability and quality of life initiatives through local municipalities, nonprofits, and development agencies. Uses can include infrastructure improvement or development, building rehabilitation, community facilities, planning, and recreation. See: <http://www.newpa.com/programDetail.aspx?id=72>

The **Local Municipal Resources and Development Program** (Department of Community and Economic Development) provides grants to municipalities or nonprofits for quality of life improvements. This is defined as infrastructure improvement or construction, building rehabilitation, community facilities, planning, and recreation. See: <http://www.newpa.com/programDetail.aspx?id=78>

Other Potential Funding Sources

Beyond the state's programs, there are a number of local and federal funding sources that focus on natural resources, urban revitalization, and historic preservation. These are likely sources of support for implementation of the Strategy.

York County Inter-Governmental Cooperation Grant Program has funding for eligible projects that include land use planning for recreational purposes, comprehensive planning processes, traffic and transportation planning, and streetscape planning that involves two or more municipalities.

Lancaster County Urban Enhancement Fund for farmland and open space preservation, and economic and community development in urbanized areas.

The River Towns area is located in the Lower Susquehanna region of the **Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network** (CBGN). CBGN provides matching "network grants" through the National Park Service for implementation, access, conservation, or restoration projects that both advance CBGN goals and are located in designated gateways. Grants range from \$5,000 to \$150,000 and require a 1:1 match, which can include in-kind contributions/services. See: <http://www.baygateways.net/grants.cfm>

New Markets Tax Credits are administered through a number of channels, the National Trust for Historic Preservation among them. They can be allotted as monetary awards or tax credits and generally apply to mixed-use or commercial development projects in low-income urban areas. Qualifying uses include residential rentals and community or cultural facilities. See: http://www.ntcicfunds.com/basics/basics_newmarkets.html

Federal Rehabilitation Tax Credits provide up to 20% back on a certified rehabilitation of historic buildings for commercial use. The tax credits require rehabilitation projects to follow the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for work on historic buildings. See: <http://www.cr.nps.gov/hps/tps/tax/brochure1.htm>

Community Development Block Grant Funds, while less plentiful than in the past, are an available source of funds for infrastructure improvement, development, planning, community facilities, public services, and housing rehabilitation. Requirements state that 70% of each grant must benefit low- and moderate-income persons and some grant funds require "entitlement community" status while others are competitive. These funds are administered locally by the York County Planning Commission in York County and by the Lancaster County Housing and Redevelopment Authorities in Lancaster County. See: <http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/communitydevelopment/programs/>

Priorities for Implementation

The following charts suggests a timeline for implementation of the Strategy’s proposals and provides order-of-magnitude cost ranges for recommendations.

Recommendation	Timeline			Cost Range
	Years 1-2	Years 3-5	Years 6-10	
Regional Approach				
Regional Initiatives				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Position the River Towns as distinct identity and location choice to capture future market and economic opportunities. 		◆		⊙
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Undertake and support projects that connect the River Towns communities physically, thematically, & emotionally. 	◆			⊙
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create safe bicycling routes and pedestrian trails. 			◆	⊙
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Retain the towns’ historical scale and scenic and sensitive lands, especially along the river. 		◆		⊙
Regional Pilot Projects				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand interpretive programming in the River Towns region, incorporating the Susquehanna River more robustly and using Lancaster-York Heritage Region’s Interpretive Framework as a guide. 		◆		○
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance Veterans Memorial Bridge with safe and attractive bicycle and pedestrian facilities. 	◆			○
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase opportunities for public access to the river. 	◆			⊙

Wrightsville Approach— Establish Wrightsville as a place to go to, not through.				
Wrightsville Initiatives				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage more robust retail and restaurants, focusing on Hellam Street. 		◆		⊙
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage appropriate infill development along North Front Street. 			◆	⊙
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a pedestrian footbridge on the 1834 bridge supports. 			◆	⊙
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Redevelop the surviving Veterans Memorial Bridge administration building to serve a more public function. 			◆	⊙

○ Low Cost: Less than \$50,000
⊙ Moderate Cost: \$50,000 to \$200,000
⊗ High Cost: Over \$200,000

Recommendation	Timeline			Cost Range
	Years 1-2	Years 3-5	Years 6-10	
Wrightsville Pilot Projects				
• Create a gateway zone at the west end of Veterans Memorial Bridge.	◆			⊙
• Improve pedestrian appeal of Front Street.		◆		⊙
Wrightsville Interpretive Approach				
• Restore and interpret the Susquehanna and Tidewater Canal in the town's park.			◆	⊙
• Develop a York County complement to the Lancaster County Heritage auto tour and guide entitled "River Towns and Roadside Stops."		◆		○
• Develop a high-quality walking tour in audio format.		◆		○
Columbia Approach - Attract people to live, work, and shop in downtown.				
Columbia Initiatives				
• Encourage housing in downtown.			◆	⊙
• Encourage growth in businesses complementary to downtown's strengths, including the redevelopment of the upper stories of commercial buildings.		◆		⊙
Columbia Pilot Projects				
• Improve the Locust Street Corridor from the riverfront to Third Street.		◆		⊙
• Enhance Rotary Park and connect it to the existing riverfront via a greenway.			◆	⊙
• Create a pedestrian footbridge on the historic bridge supports.		◆		⊙
Columbia Interpretive Approach				
• Interpret Columbia's colorful history as a rough and rowdy river town.	◆			○
• Interpret the unique geology between Columbia, Marietta, and Washington Boro.	◆			○
• Develop a high-quality walking tour in audio format.		◆		○

○ Low Cost: Less than \$50,000
 ⊙ Moderate Cost: \$50,000 to \$200,000
 ◎ High Cost: Over \$200,000

Recommendation	Timeline			Cost Range
	Years 1-2	Years 3-5	Years 6-10	
Marietta Approach Leverage new river trail and town's market position.				
Marietta Initiatives				
• Encourage stronger region-serving commercial environment near the town square and along Market Street		♦	.	○
• Redevelop Gay Street between the River and the town square with retail and driving.	♦			⊙
• Create better physical connections between the downtown and surrounding jurisdictions.		♦		○
Marietta Pilot Projects				
• Develop the Vesta Furnace site as an interpretive experience, a logical resting place on the Northwest Lancaster County River Trail, and a connection to town from the river.		♦		⊙
• Improve Gay Street as a connection between Front Street, the River and the town Square.	♦			⊙
• Strengthen connection with NW Lancaster County Trail at Gay Street and Front Street intersection with modest improvements.			♦	○
Marietta Interpretive Approach				
• Provide robust interpretation of the Chickies Historic District.	♦	.		○
• Include geology-focused interpretation at Chickies.	♦			○
• Using the town's walking tour as a basis, produce a compelling audio walking tour.	♦			○
Long Level				
• Add interpretive signage about the Susquehanna and Tidewater Canal at the river's edge in Long Level.	♦			○
• Explore new public uses for the grassy area on the riverbank at Long Level.		♦		○
• Develop the Susquehanna Heritage Park and Susquehanna Discover Center		♦		⊙
Washington Boro				
• Interpret the key stories of Washington Boro in the community's riverfront park.	♦			○
• Explore the potential for eco-tourism opportunities		♦		○
Accomac				
• Protect the scenic and natural resources of Accomac			♦	⊙
• Promote Accomac to niche markets for dining	♦			○

○ Low Cost: Less than \$50,000
 ⊙ Moderate Cost: \$50,000 to \$200,000
 ◎ High Cost: Over \$200,000

Next Steps

The incremental nature of change on landscapes and towns can be easily overlooked, allowing opportunities to leverage community benefit or protect important features to pass. For the River Towns, significant change is on the horizon through population growth and the development of nearby heritage and recreational resources. This change represents a golden opportunity for the region to leverage the historic character of its towns, the natural beauty of the river and its surrounding landscape, and the fascinating history and culture of its people to increase quality of life, pursue economic development opportunities, and improve community vitality. At root, it is a chance to change the way the River Towns are perceived by residents and visitors—from rough industrial towns on a hardworking river to charming historic communities along a beautiful river with excellent recreation.

Implementation of the Strategy rests in the hands of those who came together to commission it—Rivertownes and the Heritage Region—and with those who stand to gain the most—the River Towns and their outlying communities. With the completed Strategy in-hand, these advocates are poised to work together to achieve the vision articulated in this framework plan. Some first steps toward implementation should include:

Focus on communication and collaboration. The information sharing and collaborative goal-setting that took place throughout the Strategy’s evolution has sparked excitement among participants and brought a new level of regional thinking and potential leadership energy to the River Towns. This needs to be continued and formalized as implementation of the Strategy commences. Rivertownes is the most likely leader of these efforts in partnership with the Heritage Region. Some early and very achievable actions might include:

- A shared events and meetings calendar available online at the Heritage Region or Rivertownes website.
- Coordinating special events. The Historic Preservation Trust of Lancaster County and Historic York provide a model for this approach—their October 2006 historic homes tours were combined and included

houses on both sides of the river in Wrightsville and Columbia. New events that require the cooperation of the towns and outlying communities could build trust and collegiality, as well as generate excitement and bring more visitors by providing a more robust experience. For example, towns that normally have heritage day celebrations could partner to create a heritage weekend, when a critical mass of things to see and do is offered around the region. An early step toward this is for the Heritage Region to meet with individual River Towns leaders and to bring borough leadership from the three towns together to discuss shared approaches to revitalization, such as a regional downtown revitalization approach.

- Crossover or liaison board appointments between like organizations in the different River Town communities. Rivertownes volunteers could also fulfill this role, attending various board meetings and reporting back relevant opportunities for collaboration.
- Work with regional school districts to develop educational programs focused on River Towns that meet curriculum requirements.

Pursue pilot projects as demonstrations of potential impact. The pilot projects described in the Strategy provide achievable, relatively short-term actions that are meant to generate excitement and support for the revitalization and improvement of the River Towns. As such, a natural first step towards implementation would be to organize groups and agencies for action around these pilots. This might include:

- Meetings between Rivertownes, the Heritage Region and each borough and community to encourage their involvement in advancing pilot projects and other community development efforts.
- Identifying likely pursuit groups with interest and energy around key pilot recommendations.
- Connecting such leaders with relevant technical assistance and funding available through state programs and elsewhere.

Choose a limited number of visible, early achievements. While most of the pilot projects are envisioned as relatively short-term improvements, some may be more achievable than others due to local capacity and energy, financial constraints, etc. Thus, Rivertownes and the Heritage Region would best kickoff the Strategy by choosing one to two clearly achievable and visible projects to implement quickly. For example, the bicycle/pedestrian improvements recommended for Veterans Memorial Bridge included reducing lane width through simple striping—this would cost very little and be a highly visible improvement to one of the region’s most beloved icons.

Increase public access to the river. As opportunities arise, municipalities, conservation organizations, and other agencies should pursue the acquisition and opening of more riverfront land to public use. River access is limited in the region, partly because much riverfront land has been in utility or railroad ownership. Even in private ownership, public access can be negotiated. For example, in May 2006, Safe Harbor Water Power Corporation announced the donation of a portion of its riverside land to a non-profit conservation entity to provide public access and protection. In December 2007 PPL Corporation announced that it will transfer about 3,500

acres of company-owned land along the river as part of a broad public-private initiative to preserve and protect the land. It is recommended that the River Towns seek to provide multiple areas along both sides of the river specifically designed for boat or pedestrian access and for equally important passive use, such as picnicking and enjoying views of the water from an overlook. Rivertownes and the Heritage Region would advocate for this in partnership with the towns and outlying communities. Pennsylvania’s Department of Conservation and Natural Resources is likely to be a significant funding partner for achieving this goal.

Enhance Veterans Memorial Bridge with safe and attractive bicycle and pedestrian facilities. The bridge’s total width is 38 feet, of which the westbound lane is 12 feet and the eastbound lane is 20 feet, plus a six-foot sidewalk. Wide lanes tend to unconsciously promote speeding – and in this case, fast moving vehicular traffic in the unusually wide eastbound lane detracts from the pedestrian environment and gives walkers a feeling of encroachment. Adding a bike lane or simply narrowing the travel lane with paint could slow vehicles down and create a buffer zone between pedestrians and automobiles—all without adding physical structures that would



Preserving the wooded bluffs of the Susquehanna valley will optimize the River Towns’ most valuable amenity.

impede road maintenance. This inexpensive approach could create a significant change in how the bridge is perceived and enjoyed by pedestrians and cyclists. This recommendation complements the Route 462 / Veterans Memorial Bridge Lighting project, a plan to replace the bridge's cobra lights with historic reproductions of the original light fixtures. Rivertownes will lead this recommendation as part of its effort to restore and improve the bridge, with support from Wrightsville and Columbia Boroughs as well as Pennsylvania's Department of Transportation (PennDOT) and the Heritage Region.

A Foundation for the Future

These small first steps offer a foundation on which the other recommendations in the Strategy can be built. Pursuing the recommendations in the Strategy promises to achieve positive change in the River Towns as the region's population grows and its natural areas expand. By protecting the river bluffs and cultural resources, commercials and recreational offerings expand. By protecting the natural landscape, creating a major heritage park, and taking steps to capitalize on a distinct sense of time and place, the region promises to become an even more attractive place to live, have a business, or visit. These resources, with the river at their heart, are the core assets for the region's future. Residents and leaders in the River Towns have the power to remake their communities into the very best of their potential. It is in this spirit that the ideas in River Towns Heritage Development Strategy are offered.



The addition of a bike lane to Veterans Memorial Bridge is feasible.

Credits

The River Towns Heritage Development Strategy was sponsored by the Lancaster-York Heritage Region and Rivertownes PA USA.

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Albert Storm, Jr. - Columbia

Marietta Restoration Associates, Wrightsville Presbyterian Church, Shank's Mare Outfitters, and Columbia No. 1 Fire Department hosted public events and meetings.

Select photos provided courtesy of Dana Shirey, River Studios.

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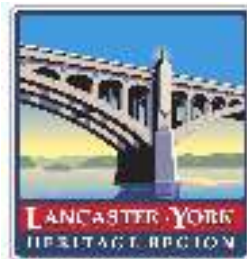
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The River Towns Heritage Development Strategy supports the vision, goals & programs of the Susquehanna Greenway.

